

Syncretism

by Avaetin

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Summary: Niccolò di Angelo, the illegitimate second son of Lord Hades, learned at a young age that happy endings were nonexistent. Bound by the world's rules and regulations, happiness is only a fleeting emotion. However, Perseus Jackson begged to differ. [Full summary inside]

1. We Begin Together

Note I: This story was not originally intended to be posted here on FFN. However, since I posted both my previous works on AO3 and FFN, I find that I should post it here as well just to be fair to those who only use this website. I apologize that I only decided on this now.

Note II: In this story, the lives of the characters' parentage, events in their lives, etc. are different compared to the events in the two series. **The separation between the Greeks and Romans gods are nonexistent**. Thus, characters like Jason and Frank will be sons of Zeus and Ares respectively, instead of Jupiter and Mars. Secondly, this story is **not about gods and goddesses**. This story is an AU where the Greek gods and goddesses are suzerains' leaders of thirteen districts. **These districts might be called by their specified names or "House of (name of suzerain)" but they basically mean the same place. **These districts are elaborated further in Chapter II. Thirdly, mentioned Roman gods and/or goddesses names are either names of mortals or actual gods/goddesses worshipped in this story, but they do not play an active role as they are merely figures for worship. Example of this is Bellona. She will be a mortal here in this story. On the other hand, Jupiter will be one of the patron gods in this story. Fourthly, there would be changes in the characters' names. They would still be called Nico, Jason, Percy, Annabeth, etc. but their real names in this story would be altered to some extent so as to adapt with the setting of the story. Additional notes on characters, translation of phrases/words, will be stated at the end

note. For now, sit back, relax, and I welcome you to venture into the world of Pangaea.

* * *

><p>Summary: At the beginning of the New Order, Pangaea was divided into thirteen districts, governed by the thirteen individuals who led the revolutions against Lord Kronos. For decades, the peace was retained allowing the inhabitants to believe that a lasting peace and coexistence under the governance of the thirteen suzerains were highly plausible.<p>

Until everything changed.

Niccol² di Angelo, the illegitimate second son of Lord Hades, learned at a young age that happy endings were nonexistent. Bound by the world's rules and regulations, happiness is only a fleeting emotion. However, Perseus Tz_jkson begged to differ.

Bound to an oath and with a war looming over their heads, the son of Hades now finds himself serving under a different district, guarding the life of that person he abandoned two years in the past. Together, the two of them are forced to navigate the world while facing the nightmares and regrets of their pasts that they never made peace with. As they partake in this journey to life, Nico will realize that sometimes, it often takes sinking to the bottom of one's misery to understand the truth, and that happiness has to be attained, not offered.

* * *

><p>Chapter I: We Begin Together

"_**But as in ethics, evil is the consequence of good, so in fact, out of joy is sorrow born. Either the memory of past bliss in the anguish of today, or the agonies which **_**are**_** have their origin in the ecstasies which **_**might**_** have been."**_

"_**Berenice" by Edgar Allan Poe**_

* * *

><p>Monolithic columns with intricate and antique carvings were engaged, the shafts extending a few tens of feet â€" design, likened to the relentless rolls of ocean waves â€" from marble pedestals to support the wide arc of the domical painted ceiling. Hardened frosted glass finely encompassed the grounds of the domain, gleaming faintly while accentuating the kaleidoscopic lights emitted by the beaded and shell chandeliers. The alcazar radiated exceedingly of life and abundance; of an untamed freedom that was contradictory to the environment the young man was raised in. The heels of his jet-black combat boots clacked sharply against the glass as the young man stepped further with confident strides into the domain, all the while calculative eyes of the shade of a russet brown assessing the area cautiously despite his evident familiarity of the surroundings.<p>

The members of the alcazar â€" local residents and military division personnel alike â€" regarded him with high respects, though the

inquisitive yet jovial expression painted across their features did not escape his acknowledgement. It was neither uncommon nor a rarity for members of the foreign districts to venture and announce their presence to their neighboring districts, as such was a luxury "a right" brought forth in the beginning by the proclamation of the New Order. These open and diplomatic relations established between citizens enabled for a harmonious coexistence; a prerequisite measure to ensure that there should not be a repetition of the grim and dark history, twenty-five years prior to the present. What, perhaps, classified for "uncommon" and "rarity" was of foreign heirs venturing to neighboring districts unsupervised; such was his case.

The black medieval tunic loosely clung to the young man's prepossessing figure, slightly pressed to his torso by a black embroidered doublet vest adorned with the silhouette of a dark serpent; the symbol of his district. Dark leather trousers adorned the expanse of his decently muscled and toned legs, accentuating the alluring figure underneath the layers of extravagant clothing. By his side, attached to his frame by a silver chain belt, was a sheathed Stygian Iron sword of a midnight-black grip and silver encrusted pommel.

The young man was the embodiment of a royalty, exuding an aura of regality that was only plausible from a strict upbringing. The young man was equally the embodiment of a dolofÃ³nos, the natural yet dangerous glint of those clear yet unfathomable eyes exhibiting immense danger. The tattoos branded upon the young man's back seemed to ache "throb dully" as if to fruitlessly remind him of the house which he served; the house which he rightfully belonged to from birth, yet was abandoning at that moment. Not that his father condemned his decision; not that his father's consort condemned his decision.

Fulfill the oath. No more, no less.

The young man chanted the two statements in his head like a mantra, his features devoid of any indication to the inner turmoil sprouting up from the recesses of his mind. The given situation was nothing short of a fulfilment of an oath; a blood oath which he had fully committed himself to swear at such a tender age.

"It is a pleasure to see you in good health, young man."

Said young man halted mid-step, the heels of his combat boots clacking one last instance against the flooring as he halted, his frame shifting completely towards the direction of that modulated voice.

A winsome elder male adorned by flowing robes of the mixed shades of chartreuse and parakeet casually stepped forth, his silken black hair and stray wisps delicately framing chiseled, tanned features. Lively sea-green eyes glinted in partial amusement, surrounded by sun-crinkles that indicated of the older male's proneness to smiling. Had it not been for the intricately crafted seashell headdress resting atop the older male's crown, the young man would have admittedly mistaken the individual for him.

"Lord Poseidon," the young man breathed, formally bowing his head low as a sign of respect. "It's a pleasure to see you in good health as well. I believe apologies are due on my part, had I unintentionally

kept you waiting."

The suzerain dismissed the apology with a sharp flick of his wrist and a slight inclination of his head.

"You should not be too formal with me, NiccolÃ²," Poseidon responded in a silvery voice, gesturing for the young man to follow. "Despite our status, you should be reminded that we are family."

The young man, NiccolÃ², heaved an exhausted sigh.

"I apologize, uncle. It's difficult to dismiss my upbringing," NiccolÃ² lowered his head by a fraction as he obediently trailed after the suzerain. "More so now, given the situation."

"Your status as the second heir to the House of Hades â€" to SkotÃ;di â€" and your relations to the family does not change, despite the circumstances," Poseidon chided him.

"The Lady, Perseus, Tyson and I are well-aware of that, though Perseus is rather displeased of the circumstances you place yourself into," Poseidon continued, and the young man found his eyes drifting to the suzerain's flowing robes in clear avoidance of the subject of him. "Triton, on the other hand, still need beâ€| "educated" of the said matter."

"The first heir need be "educated" of many matters, especially diplomacy and democracy," NiccolÃ² grunted in a single breath, before pausing as he registered his impudence. "Ah, I meanâ€|"

The suzerain merely laughed, the rich sound booming through the halls and startling the members of the household.

"Ah, you truly are the son of Hades. You possess the same vehemence as your father; it has been a while since I last saw the man," the suzerain responded with a recognizable fond lilt before his expression schooled to neutrality.

"Triton has beenâ€| exceedingly difficult. I have to apologize in advance for that," Poseidon resumed in a thick voice. "The influences of his mother â€" the Lady â€" has not aided in the least of preparing him for his succession. I fear much of the future of my district, more so the future of my other children, under Triton's governance."

The suzerain halted before ten-feet ornamental brass double-doors, one of his hands lifted and tracing the intricate pattern carved on the surface. A distant expression was etched onto those sea-green eyes, dulled throughout the ages and years of burdened responsibilities. There was confliction and a hint of anguish in them, one which the young man had been familiarized with throughout the years of becoming acquainted with the suzerain.

NiccolÃ² pursed his lips, uncertain of his right to voice out his opinions. One would assume that those dulled sea-green eyes were induced naturally and solely by years of burdened responsibilities, and perhaps those misconceptions were much acceptable than what occurred behind closed doors.

"Family." NiccolÃ² vaguely recalled his biological older sister's

voice, thickly laced with immense sadness as she abandoned their House " him " once upon a time. "It will either be the one to make you or break you."

And break him, it did.

"I suppose, that is why I am eternally grateful of your presence in my House," the suzerain firmly stated, pushing against the doors. "I entrust the life of Perseus completely to you, Niccol². I only hope that you entrust yours completely to him as well in return."

Before the young man could find it in himself to offer a response, the double-doors were fully pushed apart, revealing the grandiose interior of the throne room. Rich lapis blue drapes extended from a singular point on the grand beaded and shell chandelier, exquisitely twisting across the elevated columns. The room was bathed in a kaleidoscope of colors, induced by the rays of light passing through the stained glass windows which depicted scenes of the historical war decades ago. The sight was nothing short of spectacular and picturesque, withholding none of the ancient grandeur that it was patterned from.

The thrones of the Lord, the Lady, and the first heir was situated across the room, elevated by polished marble steps and each of varying designs patterned to the liking of their respective possessor. The family crest of the House of Poseidon, "Th²lassa" " a golden trident framed by the raging ocean waves " was embroidered on a velvet seafoam-green cloth, suspended a mere few feet atop the throne of the lord.

The complete council of the House of Poseidon " comprised of notable military personnel and the female offspring of the suzerain " were seated by the sides, facing towards the aisle, calculatedly assessing the son of Hades with immense scrutiny.

"It's of improper decorum that you kept us waiting, Niccol² di Angelo," a soft-spoken voice exclaimed.

Lady Amphitrite, consort of Lord Poseidon and the Lady of the House of Poseidon, was the perfect embodiment of an exquisite woman, with her silken black hair pinned back in a silver net of pearls and silk, and a few wisps draping over her delicate features. The lady was fashioning a simple yet elegant white gown, and adorning an elven circlet with a miniature sapphire teardrop situated to dangle in the middle. Had it not been for her kind smile and the sheer amusement in those dark mocha eyes, the young man might have assumed otherwise of offending the Lady of the House.

Niccol² gracefully knelt a few feet from the thrones as the suzerain situated himself accordingly to his seat.

"The delay is my fault," Poseidon dismissed good-naturedly as he delicately clasped his consort's hands in his. "I engaged him in a conversation regarding his father's condition."

"Be as it may, apologies are due on my part for unintentionally having you wait, my Lady," Niccol² responded while his head remained lowered, permitting remorse to slip through his usually insouciant features.

"Instead of offering your apologies, it would be the best interest of everyone if you strictly practice punctuality. Regardless of your position, it is impudent to have the lords and ladies of the House waiting over a pathetic excuse."

The monotonous voice subsequently grated the young man's nerves, though his expression remained impassive despite the harsh remark.

"Triton!" Niccolò² heard the Lady heave a displeased sigh before addressing to him. "Rise, son of Hades. And please, forgive our son for his lack of courtesy."

"Lack" is such a weak word, Niccolò² thought to himself as he completely stood, lifting his head only when said heir snorted in response. In his peripheral vision, Triton had his head casted to the side, highly likely attempting to school his features back to neutrality. An innocent brown eye the shade of carob gazed firmly on his russet ones; the high-spirited six-year old brunette, Tyson, seated on the lap of Lady Amphitrite waving enthusiastically at him in greeting. The young man allowed for a small, fond smile to curl his lips in return before schooling his expression once more as he redirected his attention to the suzerain, pointedly dismissing his figure by the side of the Lady's throne.

Evident disapproval glinted in those dulled sea-green eyes as they regarded the first heir, but was only fleeting as the suzerain redirected his attention to the son of Hades.

"There is nothing to forgive," the son of Hades responded formally.

"Be that as it may!" Poseidon murmured, more so to himself before heaving a sigh.

"Niccolò² di Angelo, Lieutenant Colonel and second heir of the House of Hades," the suzerain declared in an orotund voice. "My family and council are completely aware of the purpose and circumstances of your state visit. Regardless of the established salubrious relations of Thylassa with Skotadi, these proceedings are as you should understand is a mere necessity in ensuring the loyalty you offer to my district."

"I came here with a sworn blood oath," Niccolò² responded in an authoritative voice, demanding attention from the gathered audience. "A sworn blood oath to our ancestral father, Lord Chaos."

"Prove it, Bloodbringer," Kymopoleia, daughter of Lord Poseidon and Lady Amphitrite, demanded in a penetrating tone, her unnaturally silver eyes "bordering almost to white" equally piercing.

Dismissing his discomfort and the overwhelming desire to protest, the son of Hades deftly parted his doublet vest, slender fingers unbuttoning the three upper silver buttons that ensured the impeccability of his apparel. Once that was done, the son of Hades simply pushed the tunic off his left shoulder, exposing a prominent brand of eight arrows in a radial pattern atop where his heart palpitated.

The Chaos Cross seemed to burn under the intense scrutiny of a dozen pair of eyes; against his once flawless olive skin.

"The blood oath I had sworn under the name of Lord Chaos" The son of Hades paused as he gathered his thoughts, his slender fingers subconsciously tracing the branded symbol on his skin. "It is under the condition that I serve the third heir of the House of Poseidon, in the time of the succession of Lord Thanatos to the House of Hades."

Niccolò sharply yanked the tunic back in place once his discomfort started setting in once more.

"I offer my allegiance to the House of Poseidon; servitude as the guardian of the third heir. Nothing more, nothing less," the young man concluded as he fixed his apparel into place. "Lord Hades extends his approval of such a highly critical decision."

"The House of Poseidon perceives this as a possible alliance with the House of Hades. I have had bad premonitions of the House of Zeus, given the district's deteriorating governance and power imbalance." Poseidon pointedly dismissed the almost undiscernible displeasure that dawned on the son of Hades' features at the condition of the aforementioned district. "While our district is not instigating a revolution against one of the main Houses, I deem it fit that the council should take this possible alliance as an assurance that the House of Hades sides with us."

"The House of Hades indefinitely sides with no one," Niccolò responded firmly, his brows creasing at the thought that the lord might have had a misconception to what he was offering. "While the House of Hades highly prefer not to engage in another revolution, Lord Thanatos merely entertains the possibility of alliance at the moment. My prime concern is the well-being of the third prince. My servitude does not extend to the district."

"The impudence!" Triton bellowed, rising from his seat despite the disapproving and pointed looks he received from his parents. "Your district should be honored that our House considers an alliance with yours. Pray tell, what reason does Thanatos have to refuse?"

The son of Hades did not intend to respond, but his lips seemed to contradict his desire as he found himself snarling his response with vehemence.

"Lord Thanatos finds displeasure in establishing an alliance with the House of Poseidon when its successor is deemed unworthy to his eyes."

CLANG!

Had it not been for his fast reflexes, the son of Hades was certain that his people might have planned his demise by then. The deafening and grating sound resounded throughout the throne room as a Celestial Bronze broadsword clashed with Stygian Iron sword, inducing various startled noises from several people of the gathered audience.

The Sword of Triton was truly of an excellent craftsmanship; a Celestial Bronze broadsword of strengthened, ridged and lightened blade with a gleaming sapphire embedded close to hilt. And it glinted

dangerously close to his face, only expertly parried by his Stygian Iron sword. The primal urge of the serpentine within him salivated on the desire to kill " to spill blood " and it took every ounce of his practiced discipline not to execute a kill.

"_You have to tame it, Nico." _Thanatos' composed and stern voice fled through his mind. _"Our blood thirsts for the kill, but do not let it consume you."_

"Enough!" The suzerain thundered, silencing the feral growls which the son of Hades belatedly realized was seeping past the first heir's gritted teeth as he maneuvered Triton backwards, cautiously placing a wide distance between them.

Lord Poseidon levelled his son with a pointed glare.

"We can commence this proceeding with or _without_ you, Triton. You have the option to leave, should you wish," Poseidon exclaimed, though judging by the tone of his voice, the offer seemed contradictory to the suzerain's implications.

Growling under his breath, the young lord gripped the handle tighter for a few seconds before he sharply sheathed his blade, turning his back to the son of Hades.

"I disapprove of this vermin's presence in my House. That is my vote," Triton barked, storming out of the room and closing the doors with a resounding "_Bang!"_

"A vote that will undoubtedly be dismissed," the daughter of Poseidon and Amphitrite commented, disappointment lacing her voice as she regarded of the young lord's brute actions.

The young man considered the possibility that he had perhaps reflected impudence with his actions; a displeasing thought as he wordlessly sheathed his sword back to its scabbard. He had said too much, he had to admit, in a statement that was worded too offensively for " presumably " the council's taste.

Foolish, he mentally berated himself. _Foolish_.

Yet, as Niccolò² registered the respective responses of the lord and Lady of the district, the disappointment and displeasure he had been too expectant of receiving were not directed at him. He ingrained it in his mind that he was not entitled to experience gratitude and pleasure from that, more so when _he_ " in his peripheral vision " let out a relieved sigh once the first heir departed from the throne room.

Stop making the same mistake twice, he mentally berated himself, permitting no emotion to seep through his dignified façade.

"I believe that I speak for the council when I state that there should be no reason for us to refuse the servitude that the Bloodbringer offer to young Perseus," Kymopoleia declared, her eyes darting throughout the vast room as he regarded the gathered audience for any indication of defiance.

There was none.

"However, it would quell the council's fear if we could ascertain of your loyalty to our House by becoming a part of our ranks."

Niccolò² frowned at the implication of those words.

"That is a matter of discussion for another time, Kymopoleia," Poseidon concluded, lips pressed into a firm line as he arose from his throne. "The council is dismissed for now."

The council wordlessly obliged, retreating to their chambers one by one as they exited the throne room until only the main family and the son of Hades remained. The silence was deafening, more so elevating his discomfort when the son of Hades registered that he might possibly be intruding at that moment, given the silent exchange happening between the suzerain and his daughter. Their expressions were indiscernible, permitting the young heir little to no knowledge of what they could possibly be conveying through their eyes alone.

The intensity of his gaze scalded him equally, further submerging him in that state of utter discomfort.

"Rhode would be highly displeased," Kymopoleia stated after a full minute of silence, leaning back against her seat with pursed lips.

"Your sister always has been displeased of Triton," Lady Amphitrite stated in a matter-of-factly tone, her delicate expression grim for once as she absent-mindedly weaved slender fingers through the dishevelled locks of the oblivious child in her lap.

"For reasons you and I, the entire councilâ€¦" Kymopoleia furtively glanced at the son of Hades' direction. "â€¦ and the House of Hades know."

"Kymopoleiaâ€¦"

"Niccolò² di Angelo is right, patâ€œras. If Triton succeeds to rule the district, it is merely a question of time when the people will start a revolution. If the people could be appeased with a different heir â€œ"

"That is not the system by which we govern our district â€œ"

"A district which will slip through your fingers if you pursue the idea that Triton could possibly be "educated"!" The daughter of Poseidon countered in a stentorian voice, leveling her father with an equally menacing glare. "Ouran's stirs, and soon, that bad premonition will dawn upon and shatter the peace established in the New Order. We need an alliance with Skotâ€¦di."

"An alliance which they do not propose," Poseidon concluded firmly, pointedly casting a glance at the son of Hades who simply remained silent throughout the respectable lady's and the suzerain's heated exchange.

"An alliance which they do not propose under the notion of Triton's succession." Silvery eyes glinted dangerously, challenging the Lord to rebuke her statement. "Tritonâ€œ" "

A sharp series of tugs on his impeccable tunic had the son of Hades shifting his gaze from the brewing family squabble, only to rest upon the sight of an innocent doe carob-brown eye gazing expectantly up at him. The eyepatch that covered his left eye was a natural sight by then, rather providing a character to the bubbly child. How fortunate â€" the son of Hades mused as he lifted the child onto his arms, tucking the brunette securely under his chinâ€" is a child, to possess naivety; a bubble of haven from the displeasures of the world.

"_Mit_Ã©ra_ told Tyson to show big brother Nico his chambers now," Tyson mumbled against his tunic, cautiously fisting the fabric with his slightly chubby, little hands.

That doe eye glinted with such an innocence that could almost be regarded as an invaluable commodity in their times; in their age where premonitions of an imminent war doomed beyond the horizon. It was, NiccolÃ² had to admit, an invaluable commodity in the age of power imbalance and struggling peace.

Chancing a glance at the Lady, Amphitrite merely flashed a slightly forced smile, her head inclining by a fraction towards the direction of the ornamental brass double-doors.

Go.

The son of Hades need not be informed a second time as he respectfully offered a low bow to the Lady, securing his grasp on the youngling as they briskly departed from the throne room.

Those sea-green irises followed his every movement and miniscule shifts critically, _attentively_, and the sheer intensity of those gaze on his back slowly and forcibly crumbled his resolution to avoid _his_ gaze, and stare into the deep and seemingly bottomless chasm of those mesmerizing limpid eyes. As it was, the shallow yet excruciating reminder of their status â€" of where either of them respectively stood â€" and the successive painful throbs that blossomed in his chest, supported the young heir adequately until he had walked past the double doors.

The tremulous voice of Lady Amphitrite, bellowing "_ArketÃ¡;_!" and the brief mention of a forbidden name were the last things that NiccolÃ² registered as he cautiously closed the doors behind him with a soft click.

* * *

><p>At a tender age of nine, NiccolÃ² di Angelo comprehended of the indisputable fact that nothing tangible perpetually lasts, as he was summoned to the bedside of his dying mother. Even in the threshold of death, she would eternally be the most pulchritudinous woman in his life â€" with her deep russet-brown irises delicately framed by her long and tear-dampened eyelashes and her midnight-black hair, splayed across the silken sheets and framing her sickly-thin figure alike an alluringly dark halo. That was the image that vividly depicted itself even in the recesses of his mind, tragically the sole fragment of memory his mind had retained for him to reminisce. The memories of her saccharine voice â€" of that melodious croon, breathed like a tender lullaby â€" were comparable to nothing more than a forgotten bittersweet music from a time gone by. The warmth of her touch â€" of

a hearth he used to claim personally as his sister's and his alone
â€" was nothing more than a faint reminder of what their home used to
be, which was composed solely of their serene and quaint family of
three.<p>

At the tender age of nine, NiccolÃ² di Angelo comprehended of the
indisputable fact that nothing tangible perpetually lasts. It was
with that knowledge that he observed, with lackluster eyes, the
fading image of the home his deceased mother had built â€" along with
his and Bianca's dreams â€" over the distance, as they were escorted
to the household of their supposed biological father.

It was shortly â€" barely a year later, and at the tender age of ten
â€" that NiccolÃ² di Angelo comprehended the concept of imprisonment
as he was forced to silently and longingly trail with his dulled
russet-brown eyes, then dampened by unshed tears, the slender figure
of his biological sister just as she disappeared into the horizon,
surging forth to a world unknown.

If freedom could possibly be crafted to a physical manifestation, the
untamed and unpredictability of the element of water was undeniably
its physical embodiment. It was untamed, in that his fogged memories
conjured the vague image of the delicate teardrops that streaked his
deceased mother's cheeks moments after her inevitable demise. It was
unpredictable, in that the excruciating memory of Bianca's
abandonment of him prickled his eyes and induced tears that were
unshed on a time gone by.

Water was the physical manifestation of freedom, in that it reminded
the son of Hades of him; of that sole person who had truly defined
freedom for him. Water was the physical manifestation of freedom, for
in his alluring sea-green eyes, NiccolÃ² sensed himself being
gradually stripped of the responsibilities and duties that his status
had burdened him with. In his presence alone, breathing was as
natural as existing.

The rich shades of blue and green that adorned the interior design of
his chambers â€" his personal chambers in the household of Lord
Poseidon â€" unintentionally suffocated him, and it was solely of the
presence of the youngling in his arms that enabled him to remain
grounded. Subconsciously, the son of Hades gingerly weaved slender
fingers through the tousled locks of the slumbering youngling, as he
â€" with his eyes drifted close â€" attempted to regain his
composure.

Green was imprisonment; abandonment. Green was Bianca's color.

"_I'm sorry, Nico. But you have to be independent from now on."_

It was not a necessity, the son of Hades heaved a humorless chuckle
as the words she had uttered once upon a time, haunted him once more
in the shades of green and blue swarming his entire vision. There was
not a necessity for her to depart from his side, and yet she did. She
did so without a backward glance, without the barest hint of
hesitation.

She left him. Just like that.

"_You are strong, Nico. You can make it without me."_

NiccolÃ² did, truly he did, though just barely. _Barely_. For he was but a mere child then when the sole family he had known and come to cherish in his entire existence had abandoned him completely, deserting him under the mercy of an adulterous man who claimed to be his birthright father, and his "family". NiccolÃ² did make it without her, but not as intact if she had not selfishly deserted him by himself.

Day by agonizing day rolled by, with him repetitively and fervently begging towards the sky that his "new" life was a mere figment of a haunting nightmare; that he would awake to the melodious morning hymns that was of his mother's voice and the tinkling laughter that was of Bianca's. Day by agonizing day rolled by, with his faith on _everything_ dissipating bit by gradual bit.

There neither were melodious hymns nor that tinkling laughter. Only the haunting clanging of Stygian Iron swords as they were parried, and the erratic pounding of his heart on his every verge of collapsing from unbidden exhaustion.

"_I love you, fratellino._"

No, she did not. Bianca abandoned him. That was what NiccolÃ² convinced of himself in the past seven years of his existence without her presence in his life; seven grueling years of trying to keep all aspects of himself intact.

He was broken because he had been weak.

"_I love you_."

He was broken because Bianca selfishly abandoned him.

"_I love you._"

Bianca was a liar.

A cool yet calloused hand cautiously cupped his right cheek, startling the son of Hades from his lugubrious musings as his eyes fluttered open, gazing directly onto swirling sea-green irises that seemed perturbed. Russet-brown eyes instinctively darted " as that calloused hand delicately caressed his features " to the slumbering youngling on his lap, belatedly noticing that his own grip had tightened considerably on the brunette and was causing the child to whimper softly in his slumber.

"Is it _her_?" the newcomer breathed as another calloused hand gingerly pried his slightly trembling fingers off of the youngling, settling Tyson to rest at ease atop the scented azure silken sheets.

NiccolÃ² avoided the subject and those eyes like a plague, diverting his attention to the rays of light streaming through the casement windows.

"Are you in need of my assistance, Lord Perseus?" the son of Hades formally inquired, his voice surprisingly levelled and monotonous.

Even the mere utterance of his name was already burning his tongue;

burning him internally.

The young heir heaved a sigh in response, the expression on his sea-green eyes morphing to undisguised sadness and displeasure.

"It's Percy. And I am 'in need'," The young heir made quotations in the air, to which the son of Hades had to repress his desire to roll his eyes at the immature gesture. ", of you to talk to me, Nico. This is the first time we have seen each other in two years. You _have_ been avoiding me."

There was an accusatory note in the young heir's tone of voice, one which Niccolò² â€" _Nico_ â€" had to deem as reasonable, considering as the young heir's statements were not mere fabrication.

Two uneventful years had passed, and yet that duration was inadequate â€" far too insufficient â€" to permit his obdurate heart to cease its meaningless, erratic palpitations for a person that was not his to have. Two uneventful years and relentless immersion on his district's development were inadequate for his obdurate heart to progress and abandon his first and unrequited love.

Not that it would mean anything at all for the older male who would eventually be betrothed for the mere sake of his family's name.

"We are at that age where freedom from our responsibilities are restricted to a minimum, Persâ€" Percy," Nico breathed the name through gritted teeth, once the heir levelled him with a pointed look. "You are already a full-fledged adult, at your age of twenty-one in a few months' time. You _should_ consider where your priority lies."

"My _priority_ lies with my people and my family," Percy countered, his eyebrows creasing in displeasure at the garnered accusation. "Not with the council and their meaningless proposals of the district's expansion."

"You know what I am addressing with my statements, Percy!" Nico bellowed, sharply arising from the bed and simultaneously gripping the hilt of his sword as he instinctively placed distance between them. Their proximity; it scarred him.

"You know the exact reason why I swore that blood oath. No! The audacity of you to look at me like that!" The son of Hades glowered at the older male when the latter seethed at the reminder of his actions. "If you do prioritize your people, _your_ family, it would be in your best interest to consider succeeding over _Thãlassa_."

"That is not what our law â€" "

"I do not care of your laws and the prejudices that filled your mind!" Nico growled, his hands trembling erratically on his sides.

Turning away, the son of Hades stalked towards the casement windows and breathed in the crisp breeze to quell his bubbling rage.

"I do not care," Nico repeated in a softer tone, his somberness

seeping through his hushed voice. "Not if it means that you could live."

The silence that resonated throughout the entirety of the room was deafening, so critically fragile that neither of them seemed to be certain whom should shatter it. How amusing it was that throughout the years of their established platonic relationship, neither seemed to be of a better mind on approaching such delicate matters. Nico's hands incessantly trembled, rebelling against the will of his mind for them to cease movement, in a clear display of his crestfallen state. He hated it; that which signified the barest hint of weakness and the desire for comfort. He loathed that he had to crumble before Percy, of all people.

The poignant image of that shattered and abandoned ten-year old child of lackluster russet-brown eyes surfaced from the back of his mind.

Toned and tanned arms delicately enclosed his suddenly rigid frame, cradling and pressing him against a firm chest. In that proximity, Nico could swear of the rapid palpitations of the older heir's heart through the layers of extravagant apparel adorning the Adonis-like physique. The rhythmic beating quelled his raging emotions, lulling him to a comfort he had known, once upon a time forgotten. Their proximity scarred him, as did the lingering affectionate caresses against his partially flushed cheeks, yet the desire to pluck himself of that comfort was subdued by his shock of the sudden gesture.

"Seven years ago, you would have grasped so quickly at the aspect of people coming close to you," Percy breathed against the crook of his neck as he nestled his head against his right shoulder, the scalding warmth of his breath prickling his skin like a dozen tongues of fire ablaze.

"Seven years ago, I was desperate to have the home I once had," Nico responded in a hushed voice, slowly regaining his composure as he struggled within those toned arms. "Seven years ago, I was blinded by naivety as a child. Seven years ago, I was weak."

"Seven years ago, you were strong. You still are, more so with each passing day," Percy chided him, though his statement seemed to only barely register on the mind of the son of Hades as the warm puffs of breath against his skin induced miniscule shivers and goosebumps all over his body.

Registering his discomfort, Percy hesitantly yet gradually retracted his hands though he himself remained in place behind the younger heir.

"You have no need of anyone's protection. Or rather, you desire none that would remind you of events of the past. You have always been your own person, Nico, and I have always highly respected that aspect of you. Yet, if you wish for me to entrust to you my life, I ask that you entrust yours just as completely on mine," Percy requested, slowly annunciating the words as if carefully weighing each before uttering them. "You offer servitude, and call it as you may, but I request companionship."

"Companionship cannot be offered by a mere servant to the House,"

Nico responded in an instant as he cautiously turned to face the son of Poseidon.

"And you are not â€" by any terms â€" a "mere servant". Regardless of your proposed position on this House, you remain as the son of Hades â€" second heir and Lieutenant Colonel to the House of Hades," the son of Poseidon smoothly countered, his head tilting to the side as if to incite his incredulity to challenge his claims.

"The sole purpose of my offer remains intact," Nico critically dismissed the subject, invoking a wince from the son of Poseidon as they were dragged once more to the initial point of their exchange.

"The House of Zeus offers dark premonitions. Father and Thanatos believes just as much," the son of Hades murmured, his expression wary as if he were breaching a forbidden subject. "Rumors are that the citizens of _OuranÃ³s_ are going to start a revolution soon, and that Herakles is prepared to counter with military retaliation regardless of the vote of their council. With Triton's impending succession over the district, the whole Pangaea need not an alarming alliance between the two main districts, governed by individuals of questionable morals. _ThÃ½ssa_ needs a righteous suzerain â€" _you_ â€" to succeed over Lord Poseidon."

The son of Poseidon gnawed inconspicuously on his plush lower lip as he simultaneously turned his back to Nico, approaching the slumbering figure of his youngest brother with practiced caution. Tyson was the embodiment of innocence; of a quality which the son of Hades had been forced to strip off at a young age. The youngling was the embodiment of everything which Nico had been incapable of protecting; of all that the son of Hades despised on himself during those years of self-depreciation and loathing. Yet, he was everything that Nico undeniably felt an inclination to defend; to protect with his life, seconding that to the third heir to the House of Poseidon.

Slender fingers extended towards the tousled brown locks, brushing stray wisps from the child's chubby features. As the youngling unconsciously leaned into the tender caress, an affectionate smile curled Percy's lips before the said male lowered his head, delicately brushing his lips against the expanse of his brother's forehead.

"Theseus would have wanted the same."

The smile on Percy's lips instantly dropped at the remark, a flash of immense grief fleeting past his sea-green eyes for a mere second before disappearing once more.

Nico despised having to bring forth that forbidden name in the presence of the older male; despised more so that the name would just casually slip past his lips at inappropriate instances. The name and the history revolving around it was indisputably not flexible for any forms of discussions, and for due reasons.

"Please do not do unto Tyson, and to your father, what Theseus had done unto you," Nico urged as he slowly approached his bed, taking a seat beside the youngling's resting figure. But the despondent male had his lips pressed firmly onto a thin line, refusing to remark or voice a scintilla of his thoughts.

"If that did not matter enough, then I beg of you, please do not repeat history and causeâ€¦ and cause Lady Annabeth to suffer through with the consequences of your decision."

"Annabeth and I are nothing more than mere close acquaintances, Nico," Percy stated firmly as he withdrew back his hand, clenching them onto tight fists atop his lap. "Please do not encourage Triton in his manic proposals of forming an alliance through the means of a meaningless marriage."

"That is beside the point, Perseus," Nico barked in a condescending tone before he continued in a hushed whisper upon noticing the son of Poseidon's deteriorating mood. The excruciating ache in his chest, induced by the mere mentioning of the young lady's name, mattered little. "You and I can only defend ourselves so much."

"I will never abandon you, Nico. That, I promise to you," Percy breathed, gazing at the son of Hades with a firm conviction and an unfathomable expression swirling on those alluring eyes.

"I stopped believing promises seven years ago, Percy," the son of Hades answered with a humorless chuckle.

"Seven years ago, you did not have me," the son of Poseidon offered good-naturedly, earning a roll of the eyes from the younger heir. "If I have to swear that to our ancestral father as well, then so shall it be."

The son of Hades slowly shook his head as he detached his blade from his side, resting the full weight of the sheathed weapon against the frame of the four-poster canopy bed. The silver encrusted pommel glinted against the light casting against it, accentuating a scintilla of the fine craftsmanship of the House of Hephaestus which was executed in forging the blade.

"It is enough that you consider the idea of succeeding over _Thã;lassa_, regardless of what Lord Poseidon perceived of a possible beacon of hope for Triton's well-being," Nico concluded, that tone of finality firm on each of his words. "If this discussion is as pointless as I conclude for it to be, I would like to request that I may be allowed to rest in private."

The son of Poseidon hesitated, lips parting for a second as if to refute the conclusion made by the son of Hades. In the end, all that the third heir managed was a hint of a forced, casual smile.

"I'll consider."

It was a lie, and the sons of the two main Houses were well-aware of the unwarranted deception. Yet, instead of invoking another cause of a squabble, Nico simply offered a curt nod before turning his back from the older heir.

The bed dipped once more as Percy gingerly scooped the brunette youngling onto his arms, protectively cradling the child's body against the expanse of his torso as he silently crossed the distance towards the ornamental brass double-doors.

The son of Poseidon paused at the threshold, glancing back at the son

of Hades whom had not moved an inch from his position since the last he had spoken. It pained Percy immensely to observe the young man's hunched and guarded form, undeniably an instinctual reaction that he had procured once more in the past two years since their last encounter.

It pained Percy immensely, as the knowledge that Nico had once more reserved himself "reserved from _him_" settled onto his mind. Nico was once more shutting himself from the entirety of the world.

It pained Percy immensely because it was Nico.

"Nico," Percy called out to the younger man, but the son of Hades did not budge from his position. Taking a deep breath, the son of Poseidon simply resumed.

"I can't be what you wish for me to be."

As the doors slid shut with a resounding click, the son of Hades gradually nestled under the covers of the bed, allowing for the darkness to consume him as he curled in on himself with his russet-brown eyes firmly screwed shut.

Nico was well-aware of what Percy was implying with his words "Percy could not be the suzerain which the people and Nico desired for him to be, regardless of the high approval bestowed upon him by the council of majority of the other districts. Percy would be the last person to entertain the mere idea of losing faith on his brother; his family, despite the atrocities that the first heir had committed, unproven due to lack of substantial and credible testimonies.

Percy simply stated that he could not be the suzerain of _Thā;lassa_, which Nico desired for him to be.

That was all that his statement meant, yet the dark recesses at the back of his mind forced Nico to consider otherwise. His heart throbbed excruciatingly at the twisted implications he placed on those words, wounding himself unintentionally.

Every part of my being aches.

"I know," the son of Hades breathed, deeply breathing in the scent of the ocean "his _scent_" that lingered on the fabric of the covers, forcibly lulling himself to sleep. "I have always known, Percy."

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To be continued

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><p>Guide on this story is in my profile section._

**Meaning:**

_suzerain: a feudal overlord
(historical)_

**Translations:**

DolofÃ³nos:

It is basically a term coined around an assassin or of a person who commits murder on someone else by stealth, etc.

_Pat__Ã©ras: Father_

_Mit__Ã©ra: Mother_

ArketÃ©!: Enough! / That's enough!_

* * *

><p>Thank you very much for reading! I hope you enjoyed the first chapter!

2. The Story of Us

Chapter II: The Story of Us

* * *

><p>Pangaea â€" the entirety; the motherland and birthplace of their ostensible ancestral father and primordial god, Lord Chaos. Pangaea had been originally comprised of seven main continents; an axis of seven unified powers, up until the end of the Skoteina Chronia. Skoteina Chronia, or the Dark Ages as the history depicted, was the macabre epoch under the reign of a barbarous madman of the name Kronos, upon which modernization flourished as with the unfortunate degradations of an established society. For aeons, dissonance was evident within the societal groups, and with the deteriorating conditions due to military interventions â€" of martial law â€" revolutions surfaced like wildfire, spreading throughout the entirety of Pangaea.

Then arose the New Order.

The New Order was the aftermath of nearly a decade of revolutions which strategically evolved to an insurmountable regime change, led by the youngest heir of Lord Kronos and his Lady Rhea, Lord Zeus, along with twelve differing individuals across the seven continents of Pangaea. The establishment of New Order formulated the possibilities of further modernization while simultaneously diminishing societal hierarchy, though the prognostication of a succeeding martial law did not dissipate regardless. In the need to quell the trepidation of the whole Pangaea, the original seven continents of Pangaea had been strategically altered, thus the establishment of thirteen districts from the seven continents. The strategic distribution of territory appeased the majority of Pangaea's population, and freewill was offered to the inhabitants of the former seven continents to determine which district they wished to belong to. The thirteen districts were bestowed upon the thirteen

lords and ladies of the revolutions, as the suzerains of their respective districts.

Ouran³'s " the House of Zeus " was bestowed upon the son of the deceased Lord Kronos and his Lady Rhea, and was assessed as the main and highest district due to Zeus' considerable prestige; thus its derivation of the term "Heaven". Under the governance of Lord Zeus and his consort, Lady Hera, the district was the domain of the nobilities, and the plot of land on its own was far superior in magnitude comparatively to its neighboring districts. Due to it being a partially enclosed plot of land, the economy of the district was much inclined to agriculture and commerce, and had to be dependent of its two neighboring districts to sustain better access to trading canals and the riches of the sea.

Th_{lassa} " the House of Poseidon " was bestowed upon Zeus' second-in-command and right-hand man, and by hierarchical means was the second main district. Geographically, the district was formerly a whole continent itself, and was naturally enclosed by miles of bodies of waters; thus its derivation of the term " the body of water, "Sea". Under the governance of Lord Poseidon and his consort, Lady Amphitrite, the district was affluent; their prosperity unhindered due to the district's strategic and unblemished location.

Skot_{di} " the House of Hades " was bestowed upon Zeus' left-hand man, and was by hierarchical means the third and last main district in Pangaea. Geographically " alike Th_{lassa} " Skot_{di} was formerly a whole unblemished and rather uninhabited continent by itself, and was strategically located close to the equator of Pangaea and enclosed by miles of bodies of waters. The district was affluent, but such was attributed to the land's abundance in riches by means of natural resources. Under the governance of Lord Hades and his consort, Lady Persephone, the once barren land astoundingly flourished and had been acknowledged the richest district by means of its economic status.

Ag_{pi} " the House of Aphrodite " was a neighboring district to the top of Ouran³'s, solely dictated by Lady Aphrodite. The district was subpar to the three main districts, with its economy highly dependent on the fertility of its agricultural lands. The district mainly housed maidens " sirens, as Lord Zeus deemed in amusement " and thus the general population of the district was the female occupants.

P³lemos " the House of Ares " was a neighboring district geographically located at the bottom of Ouran³'s, and solely dictated by Lord Ares. Ruled with an iron fist, the district was of a strict military governance, " thus the name being a derivation of the term "War" " housing both genders in the percentage of seventy-to-thirty, with the majority being of male natives.

Foti_; " the House of Hephaestus " was a former whole continent of Pangaea, solely dictated by Lord Hephaestus. Despite the districts limitless access to bodies of water and substantially fertile lands, the economy of the district was attributed to its residents. Foti_; was subsequently deemed the "Land of Fire" and "District of Craftsmen and Smiths" for the inhabitants centralized their livelihood in technological advancements and were pioneers of metallurgy.

Gi " the House of Demeter " and Kras₋ " the House of Dionysus

â€" were the two main agricultural districts of the Pangaea and was situated in the central region of the largest former continent, along with two neighboring districts. Lady Demeter governed Gi while KrasÃ- was under the governance of Lord Dionysus â€" and his eventual consort, Lady Ariadne. The districts' economies were heavily dependent on the abundance of agricultural produce, as were most of the foreign districts whose agricultures were challenged by the critical shifts in the climate. The inhabitants of the districts were naturally farmers â€" the population evenly distributed to accommodate both genders â€" but there was surprisingly a distinct lack of societal hierarchy in either district. Such, mostly was attributed to the satisfactory economic status.

SelÃ-ni â€" the House of Artemis â€" was a district of indefinite location, mainly due to Lady Artemis' status as a hunter. SelÃ-ni was assumed as a district in the mountain regions that surrounded the former largest continent, though residents of the district â€" not exceeding a few thousand â€" were scattered throughout the eastern and southern archipelagos. Disregarding the indefinite location of the district, members of the district were peculiarly and solely of maidens that were subsequently trained as huntresses.

Ã•lios â€" the House of Apollo â€" was a district situated along the borders on the left of the former largest continent, and was governed by Lord Apollo, the twin brother of Lady Artemis. The district's economic status was subpar to that of the other districts, but was widely acknowledged for its medical advancements and as the pioneer of the Second Renaissance. Societal hierarchy was a matter that incurred abhorrence within the district, and thus was deemed almost nonexistent.

Anemoi â€" the House of Hermes â€" was one of the two districts of the former second smallest continent, situated to the northern area and possessing complete access with the trade canals. Under the governance of Lord Hermes and his consort, Lady May, Anemoi was the main district for commerce and had made significant advancements in terms of transportation. The population was evenly distributed to accommodate both genders, though most residents were either merchants or travelers.

SofÃ-a â€" the House of Athena â€" was the second district situated to below of Anemoi and was almost mainly land-bound. Under the governance of Lady Athena, SofÃ-a was the district of diplomats and aristocrats, to some extent. The district's economy was mainly dependent on agricultural produce, though was slowly expanding on venturing with other possible aspects of the economy in the governance of its suzerain. Equally populated by both genders, societal hierarchy was heavily condemned within the district and the concept of democracy was highly practiced.

Lastly, SpÃ-ti â€" the House of Hestia â€" was a district utterly subpar and isolated from the foreign districts. Situated at the most southern end of Pangaea, SpÃ-ti was ruled by Lady Hestia and was the most uninhabited of all the districts with its population only to a few thousand. The district was acknowledged as the "Land of the Pariahs and Expatriates"; the final dwelling of all that wandered, thus the derivation of the district's name under the term _"Home"_. Due to the harsh climates and infertile lands, the district remained highly dependent on the support of the foreign districts, in accordance to a signed treaty.

The thirteen districts comprised that of Pangaea, established with the inhabitant's demanding need of an assurance that the Dark Ages would not repeat its course once more, and of a lasting peace under the New Order. For decades, the peace was retained and Pangaea was restored to its former glory once more, and the inhabitants permitted themselves to believe that a lasting peace and coexistence under the governance of the thirteen suzerains were highly plausible.

That was, until a stirring arose once more.

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><p>"Coincidences, in general, are great stumbling blocks in the way of that class of thinkers who have been educated to know nothing of the theory of probabilities â€" that theory to which the most glorious objects of human research are indebted for the most glorious of illustration."_

"_**The Murders in the Rue Morgue" by Edgar Allan Poe**_

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><p>Seven years, prior to the present time_

* * *

><p>The entirety of NiccolÃ² di Angelo's world had always and solely been within the family property of a quaint country cottage situated atop a precipice which offer picturesque view of the vast ocean. It was the only world that he had acknowledged throughout his childhood, being a child â€" along with his older sister, Bianca â€" strictly secured and sheltered from the barbaric and harsh influences, and realities, of the world beyond the faded and slightly chipped walls of their household. It was a safe haven; the only haven he had acknowledged throughout his entire life.<p>

With the demise of Maria di Angelo and the departure of Bianca di Angelo, the vintage imagery of his haven diminished as if it were a memory of a distant past. Perhaps, it had been just that; a fabricated paradise that gradually faded onto the bleak and monochromatic background that was reality.

He was NiccolÃ² di Angelo, second son â€" illegitimate â€" of the suzerain Lord Hades and the second heir to the House of Hades, SkotÃ¿di. But those were, at that point of time, empty titles attached to his name, bestowed upon a child so that he might not condemn his very existence. They were too late â€" his father was too late â€" if they had a scintilla of desire to ensure that he remained intact. Not that the young heir would permit their acknowledgement of him tearing at the seams; not that their acknowledgement could aid in reclaiming that world â€" that life â€" which he had lost.

"Are you all right, Nico?"

Said child had come to detest that inquiry, uttered to him in distinct variations of voices, laced with a concern and sympathy he had no interest on being the recipient of. The adults were impeccable liars; that was the conclusion he derived, a year after residing on the household of his biological father. His father was ever the

impeccable liar, inquiring of his well-being in his presence, then condemning his existence the next for his features were a bitter reminder; a male replica of the beautiful features of the late Maria di Angelo.

Bianca's wasâ€¦ _tolerable_.

"My name is NiccolÃ², Father," the child responded, voice low and firm, dodging in offering an answer that had always been unchanging.

No, I am not. I did not desire any of these.

"Do not worry, NiccolÃ². You would not beâ€¦ forced in the room during the proceedings of the Summer Solstice. I have the impression that you are much inclined to exploring ThÃ;lassa as you please â€" with the supervision of the guards â€" and see how different their culture is, compared to ours," the first heir intervened, before the suzerain could reprimand the younger, suggesting in kind and offering the young child a warm smile as he cautiously grasped Nico's lax left hand.

Thanatos, first heir and legitimate son of Lord Hades and Colonel of the military division of SkotÃ;di. At the age of twenty, Thanatos' physical appearance was much inclined to the Lady's side of the family, with him possessing rich honey golden eyes that seemed molten under the glaring lights, and a complexion the shade of teakwood. Thanatos was undoubtedly a captivating man â€" that much Nico was certain of â€" possessing a lean and muscular physique, and a regal face that was alluringly framed by silky jet-black hair that flowed down to his upper back.

Thanatos was a brotherly figure that Nico had come to acknowledge, for it there had to be someone â€" _anyone_ â€" in that palatial prison that properly acknowledged his mute lamentations, it was solely Thanatos. Regardless, the older male would be foolish should he express a scintilla of hope that he might permanently occupy the barest of void in Nico's which the departure of his biological sister left widely gaping. Not that Thanatos indulged on him than to the extent of offering him a temporary sense of freedom and the companionship of a sibling.

"Will you accompany me?" Nico inquired politely, cautiously lifting his dull russet brown eyes to meet his older brother's.

Nico was uncertain what expression he was adorning then, as Thanatos features had naturally become inscrutable once more. The warm smiles were fragments of his once fabricated paradise, Nico thought to himself, slipping rarely and presumably solely for him. In actuality, Thanatos's personality was contradictory, attributed to the strict upbringing of the suzerain and his consort. The young man was believed to be merciless and indiscriminating, emitting an aura of danger which Nico had by then found himself accustomed to. The first heir possessed a dark sense of humor, similarly to their father, which burdened most individuals with utmost difficulty in distinguishing the fine line between his witty remarks and lethal threats.

And Thanatos was, by all means, lethal. The sheer sight of the first heir brandishing his sword, with a fluidity attributed to years of

being under the tutelage of their father, would have any impudent human cowering in immense fear.

"Perhaps I might. I offer no promises," Thanatos responded, paying no mind to their father's close scrutiny. "I do believe though that Lord Poseidon's third heir offered to take you to where you please to venture. It might be a good idea, and you may appreciate better the company of someone closer to your age."

A frown creased the child's delicate features at the response, more so at the offered company of a suzerain's son — a mere stranger. He need not the companion of another pair of prying eyes. He need not need a false sense of hospitality; a mere façade solely for the sake of establishing good relations with foreign districts.

He need not be a key player in such a flamboyant yet putrid society.

Thanatos noticed his reaction.

"Let us settle with an agreement then." Thanatos halted mid-step, kneeling before the child and resuming in a hushed voice that was solely audible to them. "If you do not enjoy the third heir's company, I shall accompany you for a whole day to anywhere you please in Skotādi. That — I promise to you."

Russet brown eyes widened by a mere fraction in response, and as Thanatos extended his right hand upon utterance of his offer, Nico's eyes narrowed to slits out of sheer suspicion at the older male's bold proclamation.

The first heirs of the districts were raised upon a strict upbringing, molded at a young age to the ideal succeeding suzerains of Pangaea. Thanatos was not an exception, and his upbringing was rather much austere under their father's supervision. The young man was educated in all aspects, groomed to regality but with the blood of a natural warrior; all of which under Lord Hades' tutelage. It was uncontestable, seeing as Skotādi had come such a long way from what it had been, to the astounding glory that it now possessed. It only deserved a rightful heir to continue the legacy of the first suzerain, Lord Hades.

Time was such a precious factor for Thanatos, and the young man would never risk bargaining it — of conducting in a bargain, in general — unless he was assured of emerging victorious.

"You know Lord Poseidon's son." It was not a question, but rather a statement with an accusatory note. "And you are sure that I will like his company."

The fleeting amusement that crossed past those molten honey gold irises was enough confirmation.

"All right," Nico nodded begrudgingly, his tone hushed as he clasped his hand against the young man's to seal their agreement. "I will hold onto that promise, Thanatos."

"That is quite an endearing sight," an amused voice lightly remarked.

The first heir heaved a barely audible sigh, his expression twisting quite indefinitely.

"You should polish on your manners, Lord Theseus," Thanatos breathed, vague disappointment in his tone as he gracefully arose once more to his full height, directing his attention to a young man leaning against one of the monolithic columns on the Lord Poseidon's palatial household.

"In my defense, it was a rarity to see you reflectâ€¦ compassion and fraternal love. It quite contradicts the popular belief of people regarding you."

Nico barely registered that they had already ventured into the grand hallway when his eyes landed on the form of a winsome young man, roughly the age of fifteen or sixteen, with long and curly raven locks and murky sea-green eyes which appealed as unnatural to the child. No, not unnatural. For some reason, it simply did not befit the young man perfectly.

The young man â€" Theseus â€" adorned a full regalia of Brandeis blue with various embroideries of the riches of the sea and the family crest of the House of Poseidon on the section just beneath the area of where his heart palpitated. With a practiced yet fetching smile curling his lips, it was evident that the young man was of nobility; perhaps a son of the suzerain of ThÃ¡lassa.

"Anyway, it has been quite a long while since our last encounter," Theseus proclaimed casually as he cautiously stepped forward, kneeling a mere few feet from the suzerain of SkotÃ¡di. "Lord Hades, it gives me utmost pleasure to welcome your family into our humble abode in the duration of your stay."

"I express our utmost gratitude, on behalf of my family," the suzerain responded formally, though there was the barest hint of disappointment in his tone. "Though, customarily so, I believe it should have been your older brother, the first heir, to have welcomed us into yourâ€¦ ah, "humble abode"."

"Triton had beenâ€¦ preoccupied with the company of Herakles, under the insistence of Lord Zeus," Theseus provided slowly, as if carefully weighing each word against his tongue, as he slowly arose to full height once more.

Nico did not miss the subtle grimace on Thanatos' features at the aforementioned names.

"Lord Zeus has always been invested with forging a diplomatic alliance with our House, for some inexplicable reason," Theseus concluded, randomly gesturing his hands in circles.

However, upon sensing a drastic plummet to the pleasant mood, Nico was partially certain that his father and Thanatos apparently had that "inexplicable" reason completely figured out; one which Nico would not register in his mind until a couple of years in the future.

"Ah, enough of that adult gibberish. I am sure the suzerains and the first heirs would divulge on that in the duration of the proceedings of the Summer Solstice," the son of Poseidon offered good-naturedly

as he redirected his attention to the child, kneeling a mere feet from the latter.

"You must be Nico. Thanatos rather fondly mentioned you once when we encountered each other on a visit to Gi," Theseus remarked, his lips curled at ease to a friendly smile as he regarded the child. "As you might have heard, my name is Theseus. Second son of Lord Poseidon and the second heir to the House of Poseidon. It's a pleasure to make your acquaintance, young one."

"My name is Niccolò², not Nico, Lord Theseus," the child countered, a dangerous lilt in his voice as he regarded the older male with a certain defiance.

No one was allowed to address him with such familiarity. It was now solely a right of his deceased mother, and once the right of a sibling who had abandoned him.

The young lord blinked in surprise, sea-green eyes evidently widening at the cold treatment he had received from a child. For a second, the second son of Hades was contemplative of his action — weighing in his mind that he might have overstepped some social boundaries and might be receiving a reprimand from his father — before the son of Poseidon loudly heaved an amused laugh.

"Truly you are siblings!" Theseus chortled, regarding the child with evident respect. "Thanatos has already influenced you much with his personality."

"Theseus has a vexatious habit of bestowing nicknames," Thanatos offered to his younger brother, in place of the chortling heir, before he turned his firm gaze onto the said heir. "I hope you respect my brother's request of addressing him properly by his actual name. I would not wish to invoke agreement from you through unconventional means."

"At ease," Theseus offered once his laughter subsided, lifting his hands up in a gesture of surrender. "I shall respect your brother's request, though he might have to convince Percy otherwise. I might or might not have introduced your brother — my brother's potential friend — by that short name."

Theseus redirected his attention once more to the second son of Hades, who was then offering a quite intimidating glare. Ah, a true son of the House of Hades.

"My younger brother had been truly looking forward to your arrival. Regardless of our short age difference — just a little over two years — he needs someone who is rather — ah, less acquainted with these adult proceedings," Theseus offered to the child with a warm smile, pausing briefly in mid-sentence as he struggled to construct his words appropriately. "And he is most delighted to meet someone that is like him. I truly have high hopes that you could establish a friendship with him."

The young man trailed off, though there was a subtle twitch in those full lips that indicated otherwise. The name of Thanatos and the first heir of Thālassa, Lord Triton, vaguely registered in his ears as Theseus almost inaudibly mumbled, a remorseful and distant expression fleeting past those sea-green eyes. His curiosity was

piqued, though a subtle warning in his head indicated that it was not his position to question any personal matter regarding Thanatos' profile.

Perhaps, he had the right, but there was a certainty in his mind that Thanatos would not completely disclose such personal information to him.

"Enough idle chit-chat," Theseus finally exclaimed when the second son of Hades offered nothing but his silence. _The blood of Lord Hades truly flows through his very veins._ "With your permission, I would be honored to escort you to the council room."

"I suppose your presence is tolerable," Hades remarked, suppressing his desire to heave a resigned sigh. "Lead the way."

With a practiced and formal smile curling his lips, the son of Poseidon naturally folded his hands behind his back before gesturing for the family to follow.

The heels of their shoes sharply clacked distastefully against the unnatural hardened frosted glass of the flooring, seeming to resound throughout the empty hallway. Nico inconspicuously surveyed the area with inquisitive eyes, temporarily basking in the presence of a differing cultural atmosphere.

ThÃ;lassa was a complete and utterly glaring contradiction to his homeland, though it was rather not distastefully so. There was a certain sense of abundance in ThÃ;lassa that was nonexistent in his homeland; not necessarily so pertaining to riches. There was an abundance in life, and a sense of freedom that hauntingly resembled that which he used to have in a time that had long gone by. There was a glaring radiance that naturally reflected in the expressions of the residents; a radiance that reminded him a crystalline memory of what was once his naivety.

The new environment was unintentionally scarring his bruised and battered soul, yet the familiar sensation of wanting to covet these â€" all of these flickering reminders of what was once his happiness â€" haunted him most.

"Can you manage on your own for a while?" Thanatos inquired in a hushed murmur from above him.

Nico was certain that his expression had unintentionally slipped, permitting the vacancy of his dull russet brown eyes to make itself known. The child schooled his expression once more, naturally stripping his features of any emotion.

When had it been that such deception was something he could manage off as naturally as if it were breathing itself? Nico could neither grasp for the answer, nor offer a scintilla of concern for his slipping humanity.

"I will be fine."

No. He never had been; not in a long while.

It was a lie Nico had been feeding everyone with; a lie which only a handful was attuned to. No one could salvage him. No one could

possibly accomplish such a feat.

Thanatos easily registered the lie, his lips parting for a split second as if he desired to respond to such blatant lie. Those lips parted, quivered for a split second, before slipping shut once more, yet much taut than what it had previously been. There was displeasure in those honey gold irises, yet the barest hint of practiced patience and respect as well which had always "always" been applicable to Nico.

Thanatos despised lies, and that much Nico was certain of. Yet, for his sake, he caved in with Nico's deceptive lies.

The mere presence of a child in such a critical gathering "his mere presence as the second son of a suzerain" was merely a public façade. A public façade he had no desire of partaking in, had he possessed a choice. In reality, he was just the son of a deceased Maria di Angelo, and that was the only fact of his life that he had come to know and to accept. He did not belong in this lavish world of deceptive lies and saccharinely maddening croons.

This was not his life.

"Ah, Theseus. How pleasant of you to escort Lord Hades and the young heirs to the council room," a modulated voice remarked, startling the child from his musings as he risked a glance up towards the owner of that levelled voice.

"It was my pleasure, Father. Though I believe that Lord Hades rather found my presence" unexpected," Theseus responded, an amused lilt in his tone as he took larger steps, halting once he reached the side of said man.

Theseus was only the barest of a replica of his father, Lord Poseidon "as Nico recognized from various portraits that cluttered the hallways of the alcazar" as the only distinct feature which the young man possessed that was of his father's was his sea-green eyes and jet-black locks. The suzerain was adorning a warm and natural smile that almost had the child caving in to the desire to drop his heightened guard.

"For valid reasons," Hades commented, a glint of amusement briefly passing through those dark eyes as they regarded the suzerain of Thālassa. "I had rather expected your first son to welcome us to your" ah, humble abode, as Theseus had phrased it."

"Zeus" encouraged my son's company to Herakles," Poseidon slowly stated, his expression contorting to displeasure for a split second before smoothing out once more with a practiced ease. "As for the Lady, she had to" ah" "address" to the present female suzerains. Nonetheless, I do apologize to you and your sons."

"There was none to forgive, Lord Poseidon," Thanatos offered. "Theseus had been rather" accommodating and hospitable."

"I am pleased to hear that," the suzerain stated with a genuine smile, though one of his eyebrows arched while his expression became amused and inquisitive at the first heir's brief pause and choice of words. "Just as I am pleased to see you and your father in good health. Though, I would prefer that you do drop such formality when

it is only us present."

"Perhaps when there is much privacy," Thanatos said, allowing the barest hint of a smile to curl his lips, though it was rather professional rather than natural. "It would be improper to address the suzerain of Thālassa with such familiarity regardless of the close ties of our families."

"You and your strict upbringing," Poseidon remarked with an amused chuckle, shifting an almost accusatory glance at the suzerain of Skotādi, whose features simply remained neutral.

The personality of the suzerain before his presence was a complete contradictory to that merciless depictions perceived from mere portraits; a contradiction which had caught the child off-guard. The suzerain radiated no hint of hostility and lacked of an intimidating aura, despite that his presence demanded respect. Lord Poseidon, Nico gathered in his mind as he cautiously scrutinized the older male, strayed from the stereotypical image attached to a suzerain. In Nico's presence, he was but a hospitable host and a father; a father, which Nico had to admit and with guilt, who he would have rather had instead.

No, the child mentally dismissed of such thoughts, his free hand clenching onto a tight fist. He did not need a father. He needed his mother and his sister; his entire family and the life which they had built on that quaint household of faded and chipped walls.

Sensing the conspicuous gaze directed at him, warm sea-green eyes drifted to the small figure nestled against the side of Hades' first heir, gazing directly onto dull russet brown eyes. The child unintentionally flinched upon being the recipient of a sudden attention, before the child meekly lowered his head out of respect.

"Ah, you must be Niccolā²," Poseidon declared, a half-amused smile curling his lips as the child tensed upon being addressed. "What is your verdict of my district so far, young man?"

"It isâ€| abundant with life," Nico responded with caution, his grip on Thanatos' hand subconsciously tightening. "It feelsâ€| overwhelming."

"I am glad you think so of my home. I believe that the environment here isâ€| utterly different with your homeland, but I am pleased that you are accepting of such a jovial environment," Poseidon responded with a nod, his expression immensely pleased. "I hope in time, you may consider Thālassa your second home. I have a feeling that I will see you much often in the future."

The child's brows furrowed; creased out of confusion at the vague statement uttered by the suzerain of the district. The implication was evident, but what piqued the child more was that high level of confidence the suzerain possessed upon making such declaration. It reminded him of Thanatos', his father's even, when they possessed utmost certainty when establishing a bargain.

Was it the same? Or was the suzerain â€" though unlikely â€" burdening him with the expectancy of his future frequent visitations?

Before the child could contemplate further on the thought or question what the suzerain was trying to imply, the Lord of Thãlassa had his attention diverted, those warm sea-green eyes widening by a fraction and " if possible " gaining more warmth as a fond and proud expression settled onto those features.

Russet brown eyes followed the lord's line of sight, settling onto a dark space between two pillars. Nothing. There was nothing there. Glancing towards the suzerain, the expression on his features remained intact, and was then equally reflected on his second heir's features as the young man directed his attention towards that same direction.

"Ah, Percy. Why are you hiding there, brother?" Theseus questioned, his tone possessing a playful lilt. "Come forth now."

The child had his eyes fixed onto the space between the pillars, evident and sheer curiosity swirling on them as the young man's request was answered with the faint rustling of apparel. The shadows seemed to shift as well, along with the resonance of that shuffling sound, indicating that there had been movement; a movement that Nico could only register with certainty was coming from that space between the pillars.

Seconds passed, almost a full minute, before a figure slowly emerged. It was of healthy tanned complexion that the child registered first, followed by a lean and fit physique adorned by a full Brandeis blue regalia identical to that of Theseus. When the figure stepped completely away from the shadows and to the glaring lights of the beaded and shell chandeliers, molten sea-green eyes immediately connected with dull russet brown irises.

For once in that full year of a bleak and meaningless existence within that monochromatic world, the child found his heart palpitating once more, in a tune so fine and familiar that was solely invoked by the only family he had come to acknowledge throughout the entirety of his life. His heart palpitated erratically, to the point that he could register the healthy pounding of the blood coursing through his veins in his ears.

The figure that had stepped forth was of a young man; slightly younger and possessing a slightly less defined built compared to the second heir of Thãlassa. The young man possessed silky jet black hair, dishevelled yet so naturally alluring despite its state, and a natural smile was creasing those full lips. The young man was astoundingly winsome, perhaps more so than Theseus despite his age, but it was not his physical allure that had the child drawn to the newcomer.

It was those sea-green eyes " naturally vibrant, yet seeming like molten lava pools under the glaring lights. They swirled with unbridled and raw emotion, of a ferocity that was equally breath-taking and overwhelming. There was a depth in those limpid pools which Nico found himself being submerged onto, offering such an overwhelming and heady sensation that had his lips parting by a mere fraction.

The young man was, in his mind, comparative to one of those historical figures he had ingrained in his memory at such a fine age,

depicted in children's books and literary works alike. A knight; an authentic blue-blooded warrior of a nobility descent.

"I apologize for the intrusion. Mother, the Lady Amphitrite, requested for you, Father," the young man "Percy" declared in a low voice that had an inconsistency to it, induced by currently undergoing through his pubescent years.

The young man occasionally strayed his eyes to Nico, who refused to fidget or squirm under the scrutiny despite being perturbed of the rather conspicuous attention directed at him. There was unbridled fascination within those irises; perhaps the slightest indication of captivation, as if the child were a rare and fine specimen.

"I see. I suppose it is time to commence with the Summer Solstice," the suzerain acknowledged with a curt nod, the serious expression on his features fading in a split second as he firmly grasped the young man's shoulders once said teen was within his reach.

Lord Poseidon cautiously shifted the young lad until the latter was a mere few feet from Nico.

"Well. I believe that introductions are due first. Perseus, this is Niccolò di Angelo, the second son of your Uncle Hades. Niccolò, this is my third son, Perseus Tziskson."

The son of Hades unintentionally had one of his brows arching in response at how casually the suzerain of the district addressed his father as "Uncle Hades", which immediately earned him a subtle twitching of lips "a gesture of amusement" from the third heir, Perseus.

"I hope you do cease from ingraining it in your children's minds that I am their "uncle"," Hades countered firmly, naturally arching his brow as his second son did just moments before.

"We are all a family regardless of how you perceive it, Hades," Poseidon responded, flicking his right hand in dismissal of the other suzerain's statement. "I would prefer it much that your children register that and address me with less formality, especially now that it is a luxury of the current generation."

"I believe mother has requested that the proceeding should commence now, Father," Theseus interjected immediately before the suzerain of Skotadi "with furrowed brows and a displeased expression" could respond, and a squabble could commence instead.

"Ah, true. Let us make haste," Poseidon declared with finality before regarding his third son.

"I trust that you act in accordance with your upbringing, young man. Please accompany young Niccolò wherever he pleased to venture in our district. I hear the young lad is quite piqued with our cultural heritage; something I hope would rub off on you as well, Perseus," Poseidon commented, the barest hint of mischief and amusement glinting on his eyes as he uttered the last part.

Those molten sea-green eyes critically solidified for a split second, like a frozen expanse of the ocean "glazed and cold" yet still possessing depth underneath that hardened surface, before they

reverted to their original appearance. It was a fleeting sight, yet it registered so profoundly to the child.

The icy cold hands of Thanatos snapped him from his musings; that hand cautiously ruffling his already disheveled locks before the man departed with a lingering and critical look directed at him.

Be safe. Come to me immediately should anything to your displeasure occurs.

Nico wordlessly offered a curt nod, his eyes diverting to the side when his father fixed a look towards his direction. It was evident that he was expressing rebellion; distancing himself rather distastefully from his biological father who merely offered a disapproving expression at his defiance.

It was not what Nico would have desired â€" what his mother or Bianca, perhaps, would have desired â€" but it was ingrained onto his mind as if it were basically instinctual. He harbored no filial piety â€" could not do so at that point of time â€" with a supposed biological father who remained a mystery; nonexistent for majority of his life.

The sharp clacks of exorbitant shoes resounded through the hallway, echoing in a seemingly rhythmic pattern as the suzerains and their heirs headed for the council room, leaving the third son of Poseidon and the second son of Hades by themselves. There was but a slightest tension in the air, attributed to them being no more than mere strangers, that had the child valiantly resisting the urge to squirm.

"You need not accompany me. I would rather not be a burden, and I can manage on my own," the son of Hades offered while his eyes remained casted to the side, his tone hinting finality.

The son of Poseidon heaved an amused chuckle at that, the young man tilting his head partially to the side as he assessed the child under heavy scrutiny.

"You don't need to be so formal with me. Formality is for adults," the third heir huffed, his tone portraying a slight childish lilt that had Nico redirecting his attention to the older boy. Perseus was almostâ€|_pouting_.

"You areâ€| You were being formal just now, Lord Perseus," Nico offered slowly, his tone seeming cautious at the sudden change in demeanor of the older boy.

"Ah, I'm sorry," Perseus murmured, bowing his head low for a second before lifting it once more to meet russet-brown irises. "While I am no first heir to the ThÃ;lassa, Dad demands for Theseus â€" my older brother â€" and I to conduct ourselves as if I we were the ones succeeding over the district."

To some extent, Nico could understand the suzerain's upbringing of his children, regardless that they were not of direct succession to the district. An heir was an extension of his or her respective district, truly, and it was often merely a matter of conduct that define where establishments between districts were initiated; each desiring to emerge at the top.

Though for some reason, the child could not completely dismiss the nagging thought that there were hidden intentions between such fine lines; reasons behind the suzerain's conduct that his still partially naïve mind could not establish there and then.

"Oh, and it's Percy."

"What?" Nico breathed, snapped back to reality; from his musings.

"My name. Lord Perseus is too formal, and I don't like it. Please call me Percy," Perseus " _Percy_ " offered with a dazzling smile, extending his hand for a handshake before pausing. "What should I call you then?"

His response then, up until the present, remained an undecipherable mystery, so profound that none could concretely process an understanding of what his mind and subconsciousness were mutually perceiving at that moment.

The moment Nico had grasped that outstretched hand, a warm tingle encompassed his hand, and there was an instance that a thought he had deemed as forbidden resurfaced from his mind. That warmth enveloped him with emotions " without the excruciating pain brought forth by the remembrance of which " he only was aware existed in the presence of his loving mother and Bianca; in an illusion once upon a dream. It resurfaced fond memories " of wintry nights cuddled by the hearth; of annual mediocre cakes freshly baked which either tasted too bitter or too sweet, yet ones he had always deemed as the best delicacy he had ever consumed. It reminded him of memories; of fragments from a paradise that was his past.

Home.

That warmth reminded him of home. That warmth was like coming home. And when he parted his lips to offer a response, Nico could then only think that perhaps " just _perhaps_ " there was a person in this monochromatic world that could come to completely comprehend him; _understand_ him.

" " Nico."

Niccol² and Nico were defined as victorious; conqueror of the people.

"Nico."

di Angelo was defined as "from the angels".

And to Percy, he was nothing short of a gift that was heaven-sent.

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To be continued

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><p>Guide to this fic is on my profile
section._

**Translations:**

Skoteina Chronia: Dark Ages

**Thirteen Districts of Pangaea:**

OuranÃ³s: The House of Zeus

Meaning: "Heaven" or "Sky"

ThÃ½lassa: The House of Poseidon

Meaning: "Sea"

SkotÃ½di: The House of Hades

Meaning: "Dark" or "Darkness" or "Obscurity"

Obscurity â€" _n_ â€" the state of being unknown, inconspicuous, or
unimportant; the quality of being difficult to understand.

AgÃ½pi: The House of Aphrodite

Meaning: "Love"

PÃ³leμος: The House of Ares

Meaning: "Fight" or "War" or "Warfare"

FotiÃ½: The House of Hephaestus

Meaning: "Fire" or "Light"

Gi: The House of Demeter

Meaning: "Earth"

KrasÃ½-: The House of Dionysus

Meaning: "Wine"

SelÃ½-ni: The House of Artemis

Meaning: "Moon"

Ã½lios: The House of Apollo

Meaning: "Sun"

Anemoi: The House of Hermes

Meaning: "Winds"

SofÃ½-a: The House of Athena

Meaning: "Wisdom"

SpÃ-ti: The House of Hestia

Meaning: "House" or "Home"

3. What We've Become

Chapter III: What We've Become

* * *

><p>"**Your memory is a monster; you forget**"it doesn't. It simply files things away. It keeps things for you, or hides things from you"and summons them to your recall with will of its own. You think you have a memory; but it has you!"__

>__"**•**__" **"A Prayer for Owen Meany"** by John Irving__

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><p>Nostalgia is the suffering caused by an unappeased yearning to return to a fragmented time gone by; a suffering caused by fragments of memories. It was in reminiscent memories that an individual could progressively distinguish his personal demons; of fallacious societal perceptions that would imminently degrade a person immensely. It was in reminiscent memories that NiccolÃ² di Angelo concluded that an established distance and a façade of naivety would salvage the tatters on the seams of his being; would precisely and truly piece him as he should " as was expected of him. He had to admit that he was undeniably wrong to great extents.<p>

Two years neither mended nor salvaged him. Rather, it bestowed a thousand more burdens upon his shoulders; burdens he had come to excruciatingly endure as he ascended within the military ranks of his district. The responsibility over the lives of his people plagued him of prodigious thoughts, none of which entertaining the enormity of his role. It had taken much for his complete acceptance of his position " accomplished solely with the tutelage of his father and Thanatos " and it was a rewarding privilege when he was acknowledged as family amongst his subordinates, rather than a superior.

Nico believed he had actually established " _built_ " something for himself. Apparently, he had yet to perceive that that might never be a concept fully established in reality.

Stirring from a dreamless sleep, the son of Hades had almost deluded himself that he was within his personal chambers " his _actual_ chambers " with the events of yesterday supposedly a mere figment of a twisted illusion within a dream. But as such, with the jubilant greetings of servants scuttling beyond the doors of his chambers, and the gradual increase of volume as the streets bustled with people, the events of a supposed illusion" was anything but an illusion.

"Lord NiccolÃ²? May I come in?" A heavily-accented and tremulous

voice of a woman inquired from beyond the brass double-doors.

"Iâ€¦" The son of Hades hastily assessed his state. Recollecting with his presently hazy mind, he had apparently shed his doublet vest and tunic, exposing the pale yet olive tint complexion of his entire upper body. "I believe I am not properly attired at the moment."

"So long as you are not as naked as the day you were born, it is nothing that I have not seen, young man," the woman responded, delightfully heaving a chuckle.

"Thenâ€¦ please do enter," the son of Hades offered, repressing a heavy sigh as he cautiously pushed down the covers and pushed himself to sit with a practiced and dignified posture.

A middle-aged woman courteously parted the doors open, casually stepping into the room with a radiant smile curling the corners of her lips. Auburn hair had been daintily pulled into a neat bun with merely a few stray wisps caressing against her slightly wrinkled features. Caramel brown irises gleamed with that bright disposition the woman possessed, surrounded by sun-crinkles.

"You have changed so much, NiccolÃ²," the woman breathed as she slowly approached the side of his bed, placing a set of neatly folded apparel at the bottom of his bed before kneeling in front of the son of Hades. "I do hope you still remember my name."

The young lord allowed for a smile to curl his lips, a fond expression gracing his features for a fleeting second as he regarded the woman.

"Lady AnaÃ-tis," the son of Hades greeted, delicately grasping the woman's hands and guiding her to sit on his bed. "I would not forget you. I highly appreciate your boundless hospitality on the duration of my stays."

"AnaÃ-tis would suffice, young man. I am, after all, a mere servant of this House," the woman chided gently just as she raised her calloused hands, delicately cupping his cheeks. "You have no idea how much I have worried of your well-being."

The young man did not repress his sigh while his eyes casted down, expressing his reluctance as he concluded where the conversation was heading.

"I do not approve of the suzerains' lack of objection on subjugating their offspring to partake in bloodshed," AnaÃ-tis continued, delicately caressing his cheeks with her thumbs before they drifted down to his chest, caressing the faded scars that littered the expanse of his skin. "You were but fifteen then. That is hardly a matter that should be addressed by anyone in your age."

"I am my father's son," the young heir stated matter-of-factly. "Just as Thanatos' ascension had to be done, it is inevitable that I serve my people in time of dire need."

The son of Hades paused as his eyes rested upon his open hands, etching firmly onto his mind once more the dozens of scars that adorned the skin, induced by years of bloodshed.

"It is inevitable that these hands would be covered with blood," Nico concluded, transfixed on the illusion of the haunting shade of crimson red blood seeming to cover the expanse of his hands.

"You are still my young NiccolÃ²," AnaÃ-tis breathed with a remorseful undertone in her voice as she gently clasped his hands in hers. She could only envision the turmoil these bloodshed was committing to his mind. "These handsâ€¦ True, they might be covered with blood. But you did what you had to do to defend your people. These handsâ€¦ they are meant for goodness; a goodness that your heart fully reflects."

"That does not make my actions justifiable," the young man responded. "I have killed people, and I will continue to do so, whether it is what I desire or not."

Nico cautiously pulled his hands back, opting to rest a hand against one of his shoulders instead.

"The people I have slaughtered might as well possibly be innocent civilians, subjugated by that damned bastard of a suzerain to stage attacks in exchange for the safety of their beloved ones," Nico gritted his teeth as he continued, his hand tightening against his shoulder. "They deserve better, but none of the suzerains would risk a declaration of war."

"Slaughtering these people are not justifiable. Butâ€¦" the young man paused. "Is it justifiable to desire shedding Lord Zeus' blood â€" Lady Hera's and Herakles' even â€" with my hands? Even if I do so, their deaths would not be a sufficient compromise to those that have fallenâ€¦"

For a mere second, there was a mad glint within those russet brown irises which darkened drastically as the young man continued to speak. It was only for a mere second, but in that mere second, AnaÃ-tis could conclude the degree of the damage done to that young man's mind and sanity.

That was not the young man she had come to know. The coldness seeping through those eyes at that moment petrified her.

"And Iâ€¦ I am fearful of what I'm becoming," Nico concluded, wrapping his other arm across his stomach, as if the gesture would ensure that he remained whole.

"You inherited your father's flaws."

A soft-spoken voice remarked, the tone of the woman's voice laced with sympathy and sincere remorse. The surprised son of Hades and the female servant lifted their gazes towards the threshold where the Lady and the third heir stood with refined grace, their gazes exceedingly calculative. Though, there was evident concern in them â€" more so in Percy's eyes.

Belatedly remembering his inappropriate lack of apparel, the young man hastily wrapped his body with the sheets.

"You need not be abashed, son of Hades. I have seen much of the male anatomy, given that I haveâ€¦ quite a number of sons," Lady Amphitrite offered with a reassuring smile, though it disappeared

immediately as she crossed the threshold to stand before the young heir's bedside.

"You truly are Hades' child." The reminder had Nico internally cringing. "Hades possessed much strengths, and formidable as they are, they pose flaws on him just as equally. And theseâ€¦ I believe, you and Thanatos have inherited."

"Killing has never been justifiable, more so the circumstances as to why it had to be executed. You have every right to fear what you presume you are to become, but you should know that it is a part of you that your father has bestowed upon you; a part of you that is the embodiment of his legacy," Lady Amphitrite murmured, cautiously clasping the hand that excruciatingly gripped Nico's shoulder.

"Hades' blood, your blood, thirsts for the kill. Just as much, Zeus' blood â€" which Herakles has inherited â€" thirsts for power and an absolute monarchy over the entirety of Pangaea. These are attributes you possess, but they do not identify who you truly are," the Lady remarked. "Your desire to shed the blood of Zeus and his kin is a manifestation of the justice you seek for the lost lives that had been subjugated to commit Zeus' heinous acts. Killing does not place justice upon your hands, but your intentions do not make you a monster."

"I â€" "

"If you think you are one, does that make me a monster too, Nico?" Percy interrupted firmly just as the son of Hades was about to rebuke the Lady's claim. The third heir had not shifted from his position by a fraction, his feet planted firmly against the floor.

The son of Poseidon offered a pointed look at his stepmother and at the female servant, requesting for privacy which the females reluctantly granted despite the son of Hades' evident reluctance. Nico had not even registered that his frame was partially trembling until Lady Amphitrite firmly squeezed his hand before cautiously letting go.

The sound of the door closing was most deafening.

"I have slaughtered dozens â€" hundreds â€" of innocent lives. I have the blood of fathers and sons, of husbands and children, coating my hands. But just as much, I am willing to kill for the sake of the future generations, if that could compensate for the lives I have taken with my own two hands. Is it so wrong? Does that make me a monster to you, Nico?" Percy questioned with evident sadness and a hint of perturbation.

"That's not a fair inquiry," was the hushed response that the son of Hades uttered.

Never had it been a fair inquiry. Regardless of the hundreds of lives that Percy had executed, Niccol² di Angelo could never perceive the son of Poseidon as a monster. In Nico's mind, the sole image he would ever have of Percy was of that boy in that time gone by on that fated day of their meeting. Percy could shed Nico's blood with his hands, could execute the son of Hades' life in a million varying ways or force him to continuously endure excruciating pain â€" both

physically and emotionally â€" but he would never be a monster to Nico's eyes.

"You do not see me as I see myself, Percy," Nico responded with firm conviction.

"As I don't see myself as you do, Nico," the son of Poseidon replied, seeming forlorn at that moment. "You still have your humanity intact, Nico. Otherwise, you would not perceive yourself as a monster. If I can't even perceive myself in that manner, doesn't that make me more of a monster?"

"But you're not."

"To you, I'm not," Percy corrected. "If you think you are becoming one, then so am I. We shed the same blood with our hands. We fight for the same cause. If such things makes us monsters, then so shall we be. But know this."

The son of Poseidon paused, crossing the distance between them in a few strides as he knelt before the son of Hades' bedside without breaking the contact between their eyes.

"Should that happen, we would pull the other back â€" one way or another. That is how things always had been, Nico. That is the enormity of faith I place on you."

"I always pull you back, Percy," Nico responded, a brief flash of amusement and playful wickedness in his eyes. "Never the reverse."

"True," the son of Poseidon agreed, a smile breaking across his features and imminently dismissing the subtle tension that existed only moments ago between them. "Lookâ€|"

The smile disappeared within seconds from Percy's lips as he raised one of his hands, lifting it to the tanned expanse of his neck. Cautiously, the son of Poseidon tugged at a simple necklace comprising of five beads and clasped them in his palm.

"You might have forgotten what we used to beâ€|" Percy paused once more, his eyes drifting to the younger male's neck where the same necklace should have been. "But I would never forget you, Nico. Five years don't easily go away just because you choose for it to."

"I have never forgotten. But I did try to," Nico admitted, casting his eyes to the side once a flash of pain fleeted past those vibrant sea-green eyes. "It was easier to do so, with all the bloodshed that would ultimately lead to another war. It was easier to try to forget, hoping that these bonds would not force me to hesitate on taking your life, should that time have come."

"Would you kill me, Nico?" Percy inquired, lowering his hands to clasp Nico's. To a certain extent, it prohibited the younger male from escaping. "If it had to come to that, would you do so?"

The answer was evident, but both of them needed an assurance; a verbal assurance.

"You know I could never do so. I would rather take my life than take yours," the son of Hades breathed in a hushed response. "More so now."

The third heir of Poseidon heaved a sigh, freeing one of his hands and cautiously placing it atop the younger male's heart; atop the Cross of Chaos. His expression was forlorn once more, expressing no indication that he noticed of the accelerated palpitations of the heart beneath his fingertips.

"I wish to offer the same promise. Yet, I believe that doing so would imminently push Ouran's to declare a war. As if our fathers' displeasure was not enough," the third heir mused, a sad smile curling his lips as his fingertips brushed against the mark.

"We don't need another foolish son of the Big Three committing himself to a sworn oath to Lord Chaos," Nico casually responded, forcing a miniscule smile to his lips as he pushed that hand off of his chest, ignoring how those butterfly caresses ignited his entire body in flames. "Besides, I think you give your father enough trouble with the mischiefs you cause."

"Achieving adulthood does not necessarily mean that I have to give up the little things that do entertain me," Percy defended with a broadening smile as he retracted his hand. "Besides, Tyson is under my tutelage. He would be so disappointed if I do not set the examples he tries to follow."

"For the sake of the Lord and the Lady, I believe one of you is enough," Nico mused, a grin naturally spreading his lips.

The melodious laughter that parted the son of Poseidon's lips was enough to permit the grin on Nico's lips to last, if only a few seconds longer. Within that close proximity and with the aid of the rays of light passing through the open windows, the son of Hades could clearly discern the physical changes two years had casted upon the older male.

Those untamed jet-black locks remained naturally disheveled, stylishly trimmed to emphasize the definition of his jawline, yet adequate to frame those vibrant sea-green eyes. Two years had dimmed those eyes considerably; a dullness and an edge of hardness lingering along the edges. Nonetheless, they were alike molten liquid as the son of Hades vaguely remembered, framed delicately by long eyelashes. Full lips were partially chapped, moistened the slightest bit due to the third heir's persisting habit of licking his lips. The mischief of that former thirteen year-old teen was still prominent by the manner which those lips curled and that knowing gleam in those sea-green eyes. But with his features much refined and defined, the changes were evident to the son of Hades.

Two years had aged them; changed them. They had transitioned to the harsh and cruel truth that was of the reality, burdened then with their respective responsibilities towards their people. Bloodshed had ultimately and indisputably damaged them, but that was more so evident with the son of Hades. Circumstances had changed, they had changed. Yet, gazing once more into those sea-green eyes, all that Niccol's visioned was of that blissful memory, seven years into the past.

"You have changed." Nico found himself murmuring absent-mindedly while he remained transfixed onto those sea-green eyes.

"I did, yet so did you," Percy agreed, leaning against the hand which the son of Hades had subconsciously extended forward to delicately caress the older male's features. "I missed you, Nico. More than you could have ever known."

The son of Hades retracted his hand by instinct, but was prohibited as the third heir clasped it with one of his, keeping it pressed against a tanned cheek.

"Please tell me that you did as well. If I matter as much to youâ€¦" Percy trailed off, averting his eyes to gaze at the sheets.

More than you could ever imagine, Nico mused in his mind.

"I missed you as well, Perseus," Nico breathed the older male's actual name, expressing how serious he was of what he had uttered. "I always worry constantly of your well-being."

"You could have visited anytime you wished to, Nico," the son of Poseidon heaved a sigh â€" equally of content and exasperation â€" just as he clasped the calloused hand with both of his own. "You know my circumstances. It was impossible for me to depart from Tyson's side, given theâ€¦ circumstances. But you could have visited me. I was constantly worried about you too."

NiccolÃ² di Angelo was certain that his reason was unjustifiable; inadequate for the third heir to comprehend and deem acceptable. In truth, it was unjustifiable, and much so immeasurably selfish. Solely one individual could comprehend the extent of these selfish measures he subjected himself to, and that one individual was anotherâ€¦ companion he had distanced himself from in the past two years, having had a wedge driven permanently onto their relationship.

"I am here now. To stay, so to speak, whether you wish for me to be here or not," Nico responded solemnly despite having avoided the accusation that was directed to him. "I don't think I can leave as well, until I have undergone Lady AnaÃ­tis' thorough "interrogation"."

"Ah, yes. How horrifying is the thought of being smothered by blueberry muffins," the son of Poseidon playfully retorted, though there was evident displeasure along the edges of those sea-green eyes. "Was that what the Lady and I have walked into earlier?"

"Partly," Nico admitted, tugging the sheets up his upper body when those sea-green eyes travelled the expanse of his exposed skin. "Though that can be discussed at a later date. Why were you and the Lady in my room though?"

"Aside from missing breakfast, which caused concern for my family â€" minus Triton â€" and displeasure within the council â€" with, again, the exception of Triton who might have been internally debating whether you being in a room would quell his anger or fuel it more for your "lack of respect"â€¦" Percy paused, rolling his eyes at the absurdity of his stepbrother's behavior. "The council has decided on the grounds by which you are toâ€¦ serve under this House."

"I believe I stated formerly that my servitude is to you. Not the entire district of Thālassa," Nico responded, forcing himself to remain calm at the offending information; that a crucial decision had been established without any regards to his opinion of the matter.

"Lord Poseidon and Lady Amphitrite noted of your stand, but it was extremely difficult to reason with the council, more so when Triton simply decides to involve himself with," Percy explained, growling out with vehemence his stepbrother's name, as if it was utterly vile on its own. "They managed to settle with a compromise, but I believe that is one which we can discuss further when you're well dressed."

The son of Hades has to repress tremors as the third heir assessed his naked physique once more, sea-green eyes attentively travelling down the expanse of his upper body, as if committing every contour and miniscule scars that adorned his skin.

"If that is the case, I would wish to request for my privacy then. I shall join you in about half an hour," Nico calmly stated.

The son of Poseidon nodded his assent.

"I shall await outside. Once you are finished, we'll head to the barracks. Once we get there, I shall explain everything that was discussed," Percy asserted, gripping the younger male's hand tighter for a mere second before cautiously letting go, placing it atop the younger man's lap.

"I can simply meet you there. You need not wait in discomfort outside of my chambers," the son of Hades stated, fully sitting up once more as Percy, with long strides, headed towards the brass double-doors, pausing once he had one of his hands gripping the doorknob.

"The last time I turned my back to you, you slipped from my grasp for two years," Percy breathed, almost in a hushed murmur that the son of Hades had to attentively listen to his response.

With a ragged sigh, the son of Poseidon shifted his frame adequately for Nico to properly register full lips that were rather curled with mirth, yet sea-green eyes hardened with an unfathomable expression. True, it was unfathomable, yet there was something in that gaze that had the son of Hades leaning to an inclination of recoiling.

"I swore to myself that that would never happen again. I will not let you leave my side again," Percy resumed, the smile on his lips broadening, exposing a perfect set of pearly-white teeth. "So you better be prepared to bear with me."

Percy inclined his head partially to the side for a second as if daring the younger male to challenge his statement otherwise. A few seconds passed, and once silence started to settle uncomfortably between them, the son of Poseidon simply heaved a light chuckle as he vacated the chambers, closing the doors behind him with a soft, yet resounding click.

Though in the silence of the vast chamber, the son of Hades registered nothing but the increased palpitations of his heart,

attributed to sheer adrenaline ignited by the expression that fledted past those sea-green eyes.

It was an expression that Nico was utterly unfamiliar and unaccustomed with; an absolute contradiction to the mischievous and happy-go-lucky disposition that the son of Poseidon possessed.

It was absolutely for certain that they had both undergone changes; changes which distinctively established a barrier between the two of them. They had changed, and at that point, even Nico was uncertain as to how much two years had done for Perseus TzÅ¡kson.

* * *

><p>The separation between the barracks and the residence of the suzerain was distinctly evident, not solely from the structure alone but a difference in the atmosphere. Such fact was what NiccolÅ² di Angelo immediately gathered upon stepping into the premise, sauntering by the side of the third heir who seemed rather unperturbed of the shift in setting. It was not as if it were the first occasion that the son of Hades ventured within the barracks; he had done so at a tender age due to Percy's rather unwelcomed influences. Regardless, that instant was the first circumstance by which he had stepped into the premise with the comprehension of what being a part of it â€" of the district's military â€" actually entailed for all individuals.<p>

There was a lack of hostility in the air, should the son of Hades place a comparison of the barracks between the districts of ThÅ¡lassa and SkotÅ¡di, yet it unnerved Nico regardless as the soldiers' piercing gazes critically assessed him; assessed his worth. Despite his state of discomfort, he did not visibly express such emotions as his russet-brown eyes remained solely focused on the path ahead.

The barracks were stereotypically dreary in setting, faded brick walls adequately illuminated by ablaze torches that strategically lined the vast corridors, and the natural light casting down to the building. Aside from that, Nico could not describe the setting beyond its simplicity and predictability.

The sheer idea that he would be a part of this setting had him tugging at his apparel â€" which much to his distaste had multiple embroidered pieces that absolutely embody the district. He despised it to a certain extent, recognizing the apparel as nothing more than to brand him as a servant â€" 'member' rather, according to the council â€" to the district.

"I suppose we do have to request a change in apparel. That shade does not do you justice at all," the third heir commented with a playful lilt on his tone.

Nico vaguely registered his right hand atop his sword twitch in response to the displeasing comment.

"Shut it, Percy," the younger male grumbled under his breath, his features remaining neutral. "Rather than kidding of this distasteful attire, I would appreciate it greatly if you can fill me in with the details of the council's decision and of our purpose here."

Russet-brown eyes critically scanned the surroundings, never lingering too long on any of the soldiers whom attentively observed them " him " in return. Pure instinct, Nico reasoned with himself as he registered his jittery tendencies. Pure battle instincts.

"So uptight," Percy mumbled, though Nico simply chose to ignore the comment. "To summarize their dragged, pointless meeting, the council wants you to take a position within the First Division."

"The First Division is within my direct command; their undivided loyalty is with me. That was the compromise that Dad and the Lady had managed to bargain for, so to speak," Percy explained slowly. "While it ensures your allegiance, it is also a precautionary to ensure your well-being since"

The son of Poseidon trailed off, his lips pressing firmly onto a thin line which Nico concluded that the older male would not elaborate further. That, Nico could understand, knowing that such delicate matter could not be disclosed within an area where the soldiers' loyalty were divided and questionable.

"I don't believe that is the best decision," Nico remarked, a frown settling onto his features. "You cannot expect your soldiers to simply welcome me within their ranks just because the council has decided upon it."

"The council offers a position, not acceptance," the son of Poseidon chided lightly. "The latter, you have to earn through my soldiers. Though, given that you have been acquainted with most, your presence is adequately accepted."

"Adequately" certainly is " was the curt yet absent-minded response from the son of Hades, left unfinished as a flash of silver glinted in his peripheral vision.

Unsheathing his dagger, the son of Hades only had a split second to situate himself in front of the third heir, brusquely deflecting the silver broadhead of an arrow. A sharp "_CLANG!"_ reverberated across the vast premise, though the son of Hades registered neither the resounding noise nor the deafening silence that followed as his eyes firmly remained fixated at the shadows; towards the direction where the arrow emerged from.

A tall man of military-cut black hair and focused brown eyes cautiously emerged, his muscular physique severely emphasized despite the military attire as he lowered a recurve bow with his left hand. There was a sheepish smile curling full yet thin lips as the man fully emerged from the shadows, fully illuminated by the torches and natural light.

"Fai Zhang," Nico breathed in an inaudible whisper, unable to suppress an expression of surprise from gracing his features. It lingered just barely for a few seconds, before the son of Hades' features contorted with suspicion and immense rage. Son of Lord Ares and heir to the district of Pã³lemos. "What do you think you are doing?"

"A test. I thought Percy had briefed you that you still have to earn your position here? Are you okay though, Percy?" said man questioned, shifting his gaze back and forth the two heirs, evident concern

gracing his features completely.

"Yeah, I'm fine, Frank. You just startled us both," Percy dismissed the man's worries as he waved his hand, though in Nico's peripheral vision, the hand was trembling just the slightest. "I did not expect the council to send you forâ€¦ what you just did."

"They did not," Fai Zhang â€" Frank â€" commented with a sigh, cautiously approaching the two heirs as the son of Hades was still in a defensive stance before the son of Poseidon, his dagger glinting dangerously. "They requested that a member of the First Division assess Nico. The decision on who was assessing Nico was left to the soldiers and, well, here I am."

"Assess?" the son of Hades repeated the word as if it were utterly vile.

"This so-called assessment is merely for show. The soldiers of the First Division _worship_ you, especially since the encounter with Minos," Frank offered in a hushed murmur, pausing briefly when the son of Hades winced at the mentioned name. "Though disregarding that, they are well aware of your purpose here. In truth, they are rather relieved that you are here to defend Percy."

The two males tastefully chose to ignore the disgruntled "I am perfectly capable of defending myself" from the son of Poseidon as Frank continued.

"It is the best option that we indulge the soldiers of the other divisions with a small duel, simply to fake the notion that you are under strict assessment."

Nico indulged himself for a second, arching a brow as he smoothly sheathed his dagger before straightening his stance. Wordlessly, the son of Hades unsheathed his Stygian Iron sword, stabbing the point sharply onto the ground before leveling the son of Ares with a cold and calculative gaze.

"Unsheathe your weapon soldier," Nico bellowed, garnering the attention of soldiers within the vicinity, before he stepped onto the training area with the soldiers departing from his path, clearing the area entirely.

The Stygian Iron blade gleamed menacingly under the illumination of natural light.

"Heâ€¦ knows that this is just a mock duel... right?" Frank inquired, a flash of fear and trepidation crossing his eyes once the son of Hades turned his back.

Percy suppressed the urge to laugh, lifting a hand to his mouth to cover the broad grin that then stretched his lips. Regardless of his sheer amusement of the situation, there was but the slightest hardening of sea-green eyes along the edges as they assessed the taut posture of the son of Hades, noting how the hand that gripped the formidable blade tightened excruciatingly around the grip.

"Honestly? I believe he knows, but would not indulge you on it. His pride would not permit him to take anything half-heartedly," the son

of Poseidon responded, patting the back of the other man in a gesture of sympathy before heading to a corner where Nico had utmost visibility of his position.

Frank barely suppressed his entire frame from trembling once he had turned around and gazed directly onto russet-brown eyes that lacked of any form of warmth; merciless. No mercy, those eyes informed him, just as the son of Hades stabbed the point of his sword once more to the ground with the deafening sound of bricks cracking reverberating throughout the area.

Squaring his shoulders, the son of Ares firmly secured his recurve bow behind his back before withdrawing a Lucerne hammer, twirling it back and forth his hands before securely gripping it with his hands.

"Do you want to wear armor first?" Frank offered with the barest hint of hesitance as he approached Hades' heir, an overwhelming sense of danger and trepidation coursing through his very veins.

Niccolò di Angelo was the embodiment of death; that much Frank gathered with crystalline clarity as he was subjected to bear the full weight of such a merciless gaze. Just as much, the son of Ares had absolute clarity of why he was being subjected to such a harsh treatment. He had a lot to explain " his presence alone in a foreign district was questionable alone " and Niccolò di Angelo would undeniably extract answers from him, by hook or by crook.

"No," was the cold response as the son of Hades gripped his sword and lifted it, plucking the embedded part effortlessly from the ground.

The two heirs respectively took their stances, their attention completely undivided as their eyes clashed in a silent yet venomous exchange, daring for the other to initiate the first move as they circled the training ground. Neither moved, trying to overwhelm the other with their respective auras that radiated of danger and death.

After a full minute, their weapons clashed.

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><p>Swordsmanship is a twisted form of art which could neither be accurately depicted nor represented solely by a single embodiment. It induces carnage; a risky gamble between life and death where victory is but short-lived. How Niccolò di Angelo could twist such a vile thing onto one of magnificence was beyond the son of Poseidon's comprehension.<p>

Every arc created by his Stygian Iron blade was precise " perfection " sweeping through the air with an air of grandiose and elegance. Yet, Perseus Tzirkson was well ascertained how each sweep of that blade that was directed to the son of Ares was comparative to tentative brushes with the hands of death.

Nico's movements were highly coordinated, a feat worthy of praise as the son of Hades possessed a speed and agility that was almost bestial. His features were schooled to neutrality, depicting an

unnatural calm regardless of the way those russet-brown eyes gleamed mercilessly. It was as if the son of Hades was merely gracing the other heir with a dance â€" bold and dangerously thrilling. NiccolÃ² di Angelo was undeniably a beautiful embodiment of darkness.

The two heirs dueled at an incredible speed which progressively increased with every deafening clash of their weapons; at a speed that most of the soldiers gathered were either awestruck or intimidated of. Both heirs were cutting it close, dangerously grazing close to their skins, and occasionally shearing the tips of their locks.

Frank thrust his polearm sharply, only to be fluidly parried by Stygian Iron blade.

The duel was progressing smoothly, if Percy were to classify one as a mere spectacle. Regardless, the son of Poseidon had unease gradually creeping up his chest as he observed Hades' heir. Those russet-brown eyes were progressively losing their warmth by the second, exposing a side of NiccolÃ² di Angelo that was rather familiar â€" yet it escaped his mind at that moment â€" and alarming him to a great extent.

Their lips moved subtly, conversing in hushed whispers. Whatever subject they were discussing, Percy assessed the need for it to cut short as Nico's movements evolved to something much violent with each passing second.

"Do you realize how much Hazel has been looking for you, searching for you?" Percy vaguely registered Nico growling at Frank amidst the continuous clash of their weapons, his lips curling viciously. "Do you have the slightest idea how devastated she was when you suddenly disappeared on her?"

The son of Poseidon had to wince at that, silently berating himself for not explaining the situation to the son of Hades when he had the chance the night before, or even just mere hours ago. That was his initial reaction, before his eyes dilated in realization and agitation at how grave the situation was becoming. At the very beginning, this was no mock duel â€" for Nico, at the very least. Frank must have arrived at the same conclusion as well â€" perhaps over the duration of their exchanges â€" as he struggled to parry any advances by the son of Hades.

Those eyes â€|

Percy straightened his posture, his frame becoming taut as he realized why those eyes had been so familiar.

These were unforgiving eyes â€" merciless eyes. The eyes that NiccolÃ² di Angelo always possessed when they rarely breached the subject of his biological sister. These were eyes that despised betrayal and abandonment.

Just by existing in the same space as the son of Hades, Frank had already been digging his own grave.

"I had no choice," Frank responded quietly, his devastation partly seeping through his eyes, yet his focus remained on the younger male when the blade of the sword grazed dangerously close to the skin of

his neck. "I had to leave Pã³lemos if I did not wish to risk being involved with a war against Skotã;di. Thã;lassa was the sole place I could go to, and even then I could not risk my father knowing where I dwelt, or that would be seen as an excuse to instigate war."

Thã;lassa was one of those few places that the son of Ares could find refuge due to family connections of Frank's deceased mother with the suzerain, and even then, familial ties alone had been a fragile bargain. Any form of connection to the districts of Ouranã³s, Agã;pi and Pã³lemos were assessed critically since the unwelcomed stirrings that occurred in the duration of the past two years. Though the suzerains of the neighboring districts had been rather compliant with dismissing individual acts of bands of assailants from any of the three aforementioned districts, none were foolish to buy their faã§ade of innocence.

It was a valid excuse, the sole excuse that Frank possessed, yet Percy was certain that Nico would not accept such reasoning in a heartbeat.

Nico would simply not accept it.

"You could have told her! There were a lot of means which you could have used to accomplish that. Why did you not?" Nico demanded, lunging forward once more, only to have his blade deflected.

"Hazel wouldn't have understand. She would have blamed herself for my departure," Frank explained, grunting as the impact between their blades intensified, the strength of Hades' heir fueled by rage. "And I would rather she hated me than have her blame herself."

Nico faltered for a second at the information, adequate enough for the son of Ares to disarm the son of Hades of his weapon. Rather than expressing defeat, the younger male swiftly lunged at Frank, grasping the polearm firmly with one of his hands, frame shifting to the side without losing momentum before delivering a strong roundhouse kick to the muscular torso.

Percy vaguely registered the son of Ares groaning at the impact, subconsciously staggering backwards to the faded brick walls, before the son of Hades conveniently slammed his Lucerne hammer firmly onto the wall, its spike catching onto the fabric of the vest near Frank's left shoulder. In a split second, a dagger pressed dangerously against Frank's neck.

There was a wildness in Nico's eyes which alarmed Percy, a wildness that the younger male was valiantly trying to subdue; to tame. Yet in that moment, Percy was certain that Nico was losing the fight against it, and the son of Hades was well-aware of the fact as well. Those russet-brown eyes were heavily conflicted, a devastated expression flashing through those eyes for a mere second before it dispersed, paving way for a barrage of unfathomable emotions.

"I'm sorry for the pain I am causing her," Frank managed to heave despite the firm hold the younger male had on his neck.

The way that Frank gazed back onto his eyes, dilated with terror, had Nico gradually relinquishing his grip and staggering backwards. With half a mind, he grasped the polearm and sharply tugged it from where

it was embedded on the wall, slamming the spike completely on the ground below.

Niccolò di Angelo had seen that expression countless of times, in the heat of a raging battle; in the climax of an inevitable death. Niccolò had seen that expression countless of times, in the features of the hundreds that he had slaughtered mercilessly with his own two hands.

They looked at him " Frank looked at him " as if he were a monster.

"You should not be apologizing to me. You should be apologizing to my sister. You have no idea how much it kills her, not knowing if you were still alive," Nico breathed in a hushed voice, though it seemed to reverberate throughout the entire area as deafening silence surrounded them. "Your life is in hers, in Thanatos' and our father."

Though as he responded to the uttered apologies, the son of Hades had his eyes shifting across the soldiers at an alarming rate, illusion and reality slowly blending into one. All he could see was their blood, splattered across the mangled canvass of their carcass and all over his hands.

In the bridge between illusion and reality, the sharp and constricting pain spreading like wildfire on his chest was the sole thing that truly grounded him.

Nico barely registered himself slipping onto the dark recesses of his mind, plagued with the image which the son of Ares presented to him merely a few seconds ago. His breathing was ragged, though not from exhaustion, and an immense pain surged through his entire chest as he struggled to breathe. Small dark spots clouded his vision, which gradually blurred with each passing second.

Muttering a curt excuse, the son of Hades weakly grasped and sheathed his weapons before briskly departing from the training grounds, retracing the steps which he took to arrive at the vicinity. With every stride taken, the walls seemed to close down on him on all sides, constricting him in the same manner as that excruciating pain in his chest.

Nico barely stepped out of the barracks when the spots in his vision enlarged, occupying almost his entire sight, just as he swayed unsteadily on his feet.

The entire world spun as he staggered backwards, and a pair of arms enclosing him firmly and the comforting scent of the sea breeze were the last things that registered in Nico's mind before everything became black.

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To be continued

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><p>Guide to this fic is on my profile section._

**Thank you for reading! Until the next chapter!**

4. To Start With A Clean Slate

Chapter IV: To Start With A Clean Slate

* * *

><p>"What greater thing is there for two human souls, than to feel that they are joined for life-to strengthen each other in all labor, to rest on each other in all sorrow, to minister to each other in all pain, to be one with each other in silent unspeakable memories at the moment of the last parting?"_

â€• "_**Adam Bede" by George Elliot**_

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><p>Memories of Nico's reminiscent past were not kaleidoscopic in nature, but rather of varying tints of blue and purple. Once more, in that world of naivety which he had presumed to have vacated, he was but a small bundle that fruitlessly repressed joy as color filled his monochromatic world once more. In that world, the sole things that mattered were miniscule yet significant moments with those two people.

"_Put me down, Percy!" his ten-year old self complained from behind the older male, tugging onto jet-black locks out of indignation as he was humiliatingly carried piggyback._

_There was a dull ache on his right ankle, inadvertently caused by an unintentional and minor scuffle with Poseidon's second heir. Conclusively, that scuffle eventually resulted to his evident and excruciating limping which imminently led to their current situation. Percy had been displeased, and the word in itself was a heavy understatement of the third heir's initial reaction. Percy rarely engaged in a quarrel, let alone a squabble, yet Nico's situation ultimately resulted to the latter, with Theseus being the ever apologetic and appeasing older brother. Neither appreciated a disgruntled Perseus __Tz__Ã¼kson, which was why neither initially uttered a protest when the third heir wordlessly carried the son of Hades on his back, storming off and towards the cloisters-enclosed garth._

"_Stop squirming, di Angelo," Percy grunted, paying no heed to the child's complaints as the son of Poseidon shifted him up his back so that his position was much comfortable. Nevertheless, the sudden jostle startled the child, evoking a gasp from his lips. "You're injured; you can barely walk. Just be quiet."_

_The child eventually sealed his lips, pursing them for a mere second before settling on an exasperated yet resigned sigh. A disgruntled Perseus __Tz__Ã¼kson was indisputably impossible to reason with,

regardless of the circumstances. Resigning his fate in the hands of the older male, the child gingerly tightened his arms across the other's neck, burying his face as much as he was capable of against the crook of Percy's neck. The comforting natural scent of his companion loosened his taut frame, forcing him to relax against the firm grip. Percy's scent, in __Niccolò di Angelo__'s mind, was rather indescribable, for there was solely a single word that could perfectly describe of it " sea._

_Over the duration of his visitations, the son of Hades had been familiarized with the distinct scent of the sea; of an unblemished beach and the crystalline water that delicately brushed against the shore. Percy harbored that scent, fresh yet crisp and soothing, with a hint of salt faintly registering in his senses. Significantly, it was a scent that embodied a home; a faint remembrance of that quaint country cottage atop a precipice that overlooked the ocean. If __Perseus Tz__'son was a scent, then he was the embodiment of the sea; the embodiment of his home._

And perhaps, in his company did Nico truly find a home; a home he desired to finally reside in, as a permanent dwelling. For if there was one sole individual that might come to comprehend the enormity of his sense of wanting to belong, to embrace a permanent home, Percy might. And comprehend, he did.

_It was hard to discern that their lives transitioned in a parallel plane; difficult to envision that a rather perky __Perseus Tz__'son had been in the position which Nico dwelt for as long as the latter could recall. The son of Hades determined a companion " an equal " in the son of Poseidon, and never entertained himself to judge that conclusion once more. Percy had never withdrawn any vital details of his former life, entrusting all that he was to the son of Hades gradually with each passing visitation._

_A former life with his deceased biological mother, Sal__mi__ Tz__'son " or Sally, as the woman preferred to be addressed._

The younger heir had not encountered a portrait or any image of the woman " not questionable given that the reminder of a mistress might provoke the Lady Amphitrite " but with the descriptions fondly offered by Percy, he had to envision nothing but a doting and loving mother of captivating beauty. And Sally was the sole significant person that Percy ever truly valued with his entire life; that sole significant person Percy would trade his life for, without a moment of hesitance. But alas, the cruelty of fate extracted the mother from her beloved son at such a tender age. Had it not been for the fact that Lord Poseidon was Percy's biological father " No, Nico could not dare to envision what Percy's life would have been.

_Percy had experienced abandonment; condemning the father that was nonexistent the entirety of his life while gravely mourning for the loss of his mother, questioning why she had abandoned him to fend for himself. The resentment of the first heir " Triton " of his father's illegitimate children did not aid in extending a sense of hospitality, of belonging, to the third heir. None of them could come to comprehend the negative emotions that were gradually overwhelming him then at that point. None of them could come to comprehend the sensation of imminently inclining to the realization of how bleak and

meaningless one's mere existence could possibly be. None of them knew what it was like to consider death as the best and sole option left._

No one but Theseus.

And Theseus gradually aided in resurfacing fragments of his old self from that dark abyss he had inadvertently dragged himself to; aided him just as Thanatos was aiding Nico. Percy had been defiant in the beginning, and it had taken much of Theseus to make the third heir comprehend that he was not the sole person enduring that situation.

Regardless of Percy's nonchalant claims that he had absolutely surpassed the sensation of abandonment, Nico constantly observed " in the rare moments wherein the son of Poseidon was lost deep in his thoughts " that the edges of his eyes would crumble with a fragment of the sensation that mirrored his own. There was no forgetting the sensation; it would eternally haunt them in any moment that they bask in despair. It was only a matter of how best one could conceal it that would entirely make the difference.

"_Are you all right? You've been quiet," the third heir's voice, laced with sincere concern snapped the child from his train of thoughts as he slowly opened his eyes._

"_You asked me to be quiet," Nico dully responded, a small smile threatening to curl his lips once the son of Poseidon grunted at the dripping sarcasm from the younger's statement._

"_Are you angry with me or Theseus?" Nico inquired, changing topics when silence was the response he received. "Or both of us?" he added as an afterthought._

Percy heaved a long sigh, keeping mum to himself for a full minute as he stepped into the garth, the son of Hades still perched onto his back. The child graciously bathed in the rich yet harmoniously fragrant scent emanating from the garden. The barest hint of petrichor lingered in the air, slightly overpowered with the array of flowers that groomed in the area. Sunny garden beds slope away from the main house, planted with small alpine, tiny bulbs, weeping maples, standard wisteria, and tree peonies. Flowers such as hydrangeas, maples, azaleas, and hellebore bloomed vibrantly, bathing the garden in a captivating kaleidoscope of colors.

With long strides, the son of Poseidon situated them both underneath a weeping maple, atop a small pile of lacy leaves tinged a light orange-red color, practicing extreme caution as he settled the younger male on a comfortable position. Wordlessly, Percy propped Nico's feet atop his lap, disregarding the child's flustered expression as he examined the injury cautiously with his hands.

"_Not really. Maybe just a bit with Theseus," Percy admitted slowly, pursing his lips as he assessed the sprained ankle. "I thought Well"_"_

Percy breathed deeply, holding the breath in for a few more seconds before releasing it in one long sigh.

"_I thought it was Triton who hurt you, and I panicked," Percy explained, a frown creasing his forehead._

The son of Hades unintentionally heaved a sigh at the information, thin arms wrapping across his own torso. In the course of a mere few months, there was an established friendship and overwhelming trust between the two of them, stemming from the parallel transitions in their lives; stemming from the idea that no other person held a greater understanding than either of them. As much as Percy had confided in him his mother, and Nico had confided in him of Bianca â€" whom remained as a forbidden subject â€" Percy had confided in him of his eldest stepbrother and the latter's condemnation of Lord Poseidon's illegitimate children.

Percy had mentioned once, and only once, of a fourth heir â€" an illegitimate child born from a noble woman â€" by the name Cychreus, but the name was forbidden in the household; unspoken, as if the child never did exist. Percy had confided in him once of that matter, of speculations of his eldest brother's involvement with the child's "case", and no more than that thereafter. Any mentions of Triton had Theseus and Percy cringing the barest bit, as if they possessed knowledge that no one else did; a knowledge that was highly lethal in a twisted sense. Aside from the unknown knowledge, Nico was positively certain that Triton â€" in all sense â€" was someone to steer away from. Despite his sheer curiosity of what exists â€" or used to exist â€" between Thanatos and Triton before their relations became malicious and distant, Nico was not that keen to risk an interaction or a confrontation with Poseidon's first heir.

"_I'm sorry," the son of Hades murmured, placing one of his hands atop the teen's folded ones. "I should have been more careful."_

"_Theseus was teasing you. You could not have known if someone was actually attacking you, and you only did that to defend yourself," Percy huffed as he flipped his hands up, encompassing the younger one's hand in his. "Theseus should have known better."_

"_Please don't be angry with him."_

"_I'm not. Justâ€¦ I was just worried about you that I got carried away," Percy admitted, pointedly glancing away from him as those sea-green eyes bore on the lacy leaves underneath them. "You're the first friend I ever had, and I didn't want to drive you away."_

For once, the son of Hades permitted himself to smile â€" to actually smile without withdrawing himself back â€" as he processed the teen's response in his mind. To another individual, there was that enormous risk that such statement could be taken as an insult; would invoke a negative response and perceived as an accusation. But he and Percy were different, and they possessed an understanding that few could comprehend. Percy knew what abandonment was, as much as Nico did. Neither entertained the probability of it occurring to them once more.

"_I won't go unless you tell me to," the child promised solemnly, earning the attention of the teen immediately. "I promise."_

_The smile he received in return was well worth it, and it was in that moment that Nico did truly believe for once that there was

somewhere where he would truly belong; truly be happy if only for the mere presence of a person. That for once, there was someone he could come to treasure without having to fear of losing in the end. Someone whom he could value in his heart in the same manner, in the same intensity, as with his deceased mother and forgotten older sister._

"_Promise!" Percy confirmed, lips stretched to a wide grin._

That was the first promise he had made, and at that time, he did not know that that was the sole one he would not manage to keep. That was the first friendship he had established, and at that time, he did not know that that was one of two he would eventually manage to break.

"_Percy! Nico! I apologize for being late."_

Illuminated by the radiance of the sunlight, the child could not register the features of the newcomer properly. Yet, by heart, the son of Hades distinctively remembered features " of disheveled military-cut blond hair that seemed to glow in the illumination of the sun, of electric blue eyes that gleamed like streaks of lightning in the midst of a brewing storm. Full thin lips quirked in amusement, tugging at a distinct scar on the upper lip, just as the newcomer knelt down, resting a warm hand atop Nico's dishevelled locks.

Just as Percy could not remain as a mere memory to him, he could never come to forget that person just as much.

"_Are you all right, Nico?" the newcomer questioned._

Yet, before he could come to respond, his vision was swallowed completely by darkness.

* * *

><p>As soon as russet-brown eyes blearily fluttered open, Nico immediately registered of cool liquid seeping from his eyes and cascading down the sides, disappearing within the layers of his dishevelled locks. There was something lodged on his throat, making it difficult for him to speak as unwanted emotions resurfaced from where he had contained them, drowning him in massive waves. For once, he was uncertain whether he desired to be roused or to dwell further on a bittersweet memory of a pleasant time gone by. He had been close to seeing his face once more, and despite the imagery being just a mere memory, it was " at the barest " something_.

Raising his trembling hands, he shrouded his sight once more with darkness, attempting to find solace amidst the throbbing ache induced by a haunting melancholia. Perhaps, that was partly an excuse. In the darkness, a sliver of his being coveted to recall that specific memory, to see that face once more regardless that it had only been a sheer product of tatters of what were once his happiness.

He possessed no right to weep. So why did he carelessly and selfishly permit himself to shed a tear or two?

"Who are you crying for?" A voice, so solemn and comforting, inquired

from his bedside.

The son of Hades need not open his eyes to identify who the person was, nor did he have to hear that distinct voice to register the presence of that person. That scent of home which the person embodied was the sole indication that Nico needed to register his presence; Percy's presence. In his disquietude, he shifted his body until he rested on his side, his back facing the older male.

"How would you know if it's not just some twisted nightmare of something intangible and incomprehensible?" Nico breathed in a hushed voice, his palms still pressed against his eyes.

Percy heaved a small sigh as he tilted his head back, eyes transfixed at nowhere in particular as he gazed at the ceiling.

"No matter how horrid your dreams might be, so long as it's not regarding a person, you would not shed a tear," the son of Poseidon answered, pursing his lips for a second before he lowered his gaze at the curling form on the bed. "Painful attachments have always been what has you crumbling to your knees. I remember all of you, Nico. I would never forget something so significant."

The humorless and bitter chuckle that parted the younger male's lips should have startled him, yet with the progressive changes which he had witnessed in a span of less than a day, perhaps nothing would surprise the son of Poseidon at that point. Regardless, Percy would not deny how these changes — these tatters on the younger male's being — induced tatters on his own being. Seeing the son of Hades reduced to such a state, regardless of their ages, resurfaced painful memories when Maria di Angelo and Bianca di Angelo were the sole beings in the entire world that could mentally, emotionally and psychologically reduce the other male to such a pitiful state. Not that Percy would voice his perceptions out loud.

Niccolò di Angelo had always been a strong individual, firmly perceiving in a twisted sense of a personal independence that had always imposed an intangible wall, hindering any individual from coming too close to support him. In the rare moments that Nico would ever permit himself to shed a tear or two, they only meant that he was forced past the brink of what he could endure.

Percy was highly certain that this state of isolation was not what Nico had ever come to desire. Yet it existed, attributed from the excruciating pain of getting far too close to another being, only to be merely abandoned in the end.

"It was someone whom I had abandoned two years ago," Nico then admitted, his voice remained hushed as he uttered his response. "Just as I had abandoned you."

"I still question what I did wrong that day," Percy murmured, a distant look in his eyes as he allowed for his eyes to stray at the open window. "You made a decision, and maybe you regret them, but that decision cannot be solely your fault alone. Some way, somehow, I had done a horrible mistake that had you walking out of my life two years ago."

"It's not you," the son of Hades said indignantly, curling much further on himself.

"If it's not me, then make me comprehend, Niccolò di Angelo," Percy answered, a hint of desperation in his voice. "For two years, all that plagued me at night and kept me awake until I pass out was the gravity of the possible mistakes I had committed against you. Did I hurt you? Did I say something that was displeasing to you? _Make me comprehend._"

If emotions were easily comprehensible, perhaps Niccolò di Angelo had by then discerned how his father was able to live with himself, emotionally wounding his consort Persephone, with the illegitimate children he had outside of their espousal. If emotions were easily comprehensible, perhaps Niccolò di Angelo might have come into terms with his own complex set long before they had complicated the entirety of his world; of his personal and societal beliefs. If emotions were easily comprehensible, perhaps Niccolò di Angelo had comprehended by then why he could not come close to despising his biological older sister despite abandoning him to fend for his own at such a tender age. If emotions were easily comprehensible, perhaps they would not be having this conversation where Percy had to pry information from him, and he in response would remain tongue-tied.

Emotions were _not_ easily comprehensible.

A pair of hands cautiously pried his hands off of his eyes, completely exposing his distressed features to the son of Poseidon. Percy seemed unfazed of the sight as he wordlessly released one of his hands, a thumb gingerly brushing against the moist streaks at the corners of his eyes from when he had unconsciously permitted a tear to slip from his eyes.

"Maybe you can't make me comprehend now. Perhaps, it's too complicated to actually explain," Percy murmured, pulling his hands back once he had the son of Hades directly meeting his eyes.

"And perhaps I am being too inconsiderate, imposing myself on you with the hope that we could pretend those two years never did happen." Percy heaved a small chuckle, though the smile that curled his lips did not reach his eyes. "But that is of the past; something we cannot come to change. But we exist now, in the present, and I _need_ you to meet me halfway. Make me understand, at least, all of _this_."

With the last word, Percy weakly gestured at his curled frame, of his russet-brown eyes that were dilated with the barest hint of wildness he had observed not mere hours ago. Nico was certain that Percy was withholding himself at that moment, though nagging questions pressed persistently in his mind.

'_What is going on with you, Nico?_'_

'_What just happened to you?_'_

'_How long has this been going on?_'_

'_What do I need to do to help you?_'_

'_**What do I need to do to help you?***_'_

"It's not uncommon," the son of Hades started, gradually uncurling from the fetal position as he repositioned himself, leaning back against the headboard. He belatedly registered that he was in Percy's chambers; a fact he had deemed insignificant at that moment. "The progressive killings eventually incurred a negative side effect, so to speak, with my mental stability."

"Once it started, it progressively worsened since. The confrontation with Minos had amplified it," Nico admitted, vaguely registering the taut frame of the son of Poseidon as his eyes drifted to the sheets he was clenching under his fists. "I still possess some control of myself, but there are triggers. I'm unsure of what it could be. Only a few individuals are aware of my condition, and they are the only ones who aided me through."

"Is Lord Hades one of those few?" Percy questioned, his brows raised high in incredulity.

Nico clicked his tongue in distaste at the aforementioned name.

"These struggles should be mine alone to endure. I do not need my father's disappointment in me or in my weakness to come into the complexity of my life," the young man answered gruffly.

"A person could only endure so much," Percy interjected. "I believe you would not want me to delve into the subject regarding your father, and I will respect your wishes not that I could talk much of the old man. But I told you, Nico. You have to meet me half way. I might not be those people whom you have confided with, but I have to know what to do."

"I need to know what to do," Percy rephrased his words, his tone absolutely firm with conviction. "I disliked it, despised it, when I was incapable of treating you. You stopped breathing, you know. I thought I thought you"

"Yet you managed to bring me back," the son of Hades murmured, subconsciously clutching at his chest. He did not allow for the son of Poseidon to finish his sentence, he already knew what Percy was about to state.

'I thought you died.'

"It was not easy. I had to do a cardiopulmonary resuscitation. I am qualified. I was trained once during the visitation of representatives from Aiolios. I only did the compressing of the chest back then, and on you!" Percy explained quickly and with a flustered expression as Nico squirmed in discomfort, clearly deducing the wrong conclusion. "Then I instructed Frank to call for Lady Anastis once I believed I had the situation under control."

"Does the suzerain and his wife know?"

"No," Percy answered, pursing his lips for a second before shaking his head. "I should have informed them though."

"Why didn't you?" Nico inquired, evident curiosity present in his eyes.

Percy shrugged nonchalantly, crossing his arms across his chest before heaving a sigh.

"To be honest, I don't know," Percy admitted. "Perhaps, without any prior knowledge of your decisions, I had known that it was not something you wanted anyone to know. Without prior knowledge, a part of me always acknowledged how you tend not to disclose information, regardless of their personal significance."

"Or perhaps," Percy continued, glancing away. "I realized that their knowledge of it would result to you being immediately repatriated, and I did not inform them because I was too selfish to allow you to leave."

"Wouldn't you be happier then? At least, you would not be burdened with the fact that I was forced into a position beneath yours; a fact you have always condemned," Nico inquired in a calm voice despite fisting the sheets underneath his palms in a death grip, that his knuckles protruded.

"I don't know anymore what would make me happy," the son of Poseidon heaved an exasperated sigh. "With you, there has always been complexities between what I hope is best for you, what you want, and my selfishness."

"You were never one to indulge on the best and rational decisions in life," Nico commented, lifting his gaze so that his eyes would settle on the older male's figure. "What I want for my life is mine to dictate alone. Perhaps, you should consider what you want for once."

Sea-green eyes narrowed into slits with a distinct and unnatural glimmer that the son of Hades could not fathom just as Percy's hands clenched firmly onto fists atop of his lap. His lips parted once, twice, but no sound escaped from the son of Poseidon. There was one sole expression that prominently stood out, and Nico discerned it so well — confliction.

"What I want?" Percy breathed, casting his eyes down to his lap, observing the miniscule creases on his apparel intently. "What I need and desire most — questions everything I used to know."

When Percy lifted his head and their eyes gazed onto each other — unbridled and purely raw — in the intensity of that gaze and confliction within those molten sea-green eyes, Nico had to envisage what the son of Poseidon could possibly covet that contradicted his upbringing. Nico had to question in his mind why, despite the complex yet raw emotions that swirled within those eyes, could he not fathom why such a restricted forlorn gaze was gazing back onto him.

What is it that you want, Percy?

Just as his lips parted to voice out that critical question, a timid knock resounded throughout the room before the son of Ares cautiously stepped inside a brief moment thereafter. Percy forcefully tore apart the connection between their eyes, his expression becoming unnaturally guarded as he fixed a façade of a polite smile onto his lips.

"Nico — You're awake," Frank breathed, his expression instantly

becoming relieved as he gratefully basked in the sight of the conscious young man. "How is our First Lieutenant feeling?"

"Exhausted. It's not uncommon. It always happen after â€"â€" His voice trailed off, granting the son of Ares the luxury of deducing what had happened to him. "That aside, First Lieutenant is a high position to bestow upon a resident â€" an heir, no less â€" of a foreign district."

"The soldiers are aware of how things would proceed under theseâ€" circumstances," Frank answered, wincing at his lack of a proper term. "You are most qualified of leading the First Division, and the soldiers highly respect that; more so after the duel. While they anticipate of whichever knowledge in swordsmanship you could share or display to them, they are highly aware that their actions are dictated by Percy alone. In extension, to you, if Percy wills for it."

"And I do will for it," Percy confirmed with a nod. "There is no other person I entrust more than Nico."

Frank offered a curt nod before he sealed his lips shut, keeping his head bowed low in a gesture of mortification. Calloused fingers gingerly fiddled with the hem of a doublet vest; a skittish habit which Nico easily recognized and was highly familiar with.

Fai Zhang â€" or Frank, as he preferred to be addressed â€" was the son of Ares and second heir to the district of PÃ³lemos after his half-sister, Clarisse La Rue, and supposed consort to his half-sister, Hazel Levesque. In the years that he had interacted with the son of Ares during the latter's visitations to their district, he had grown accustomed to his nervous antics and of the odd tendencies he possessed. He had observed discreetly of how a romantic attachment had developed between the young couple and eventually, how that romantic attachment had crushed his half-sister when news of the second heir's disappearance spread like a wildfire throughout the entirety of Pangaea.

Now here he was, in the presence of the man who had caused his half-sister to endure such an excruciating pain, and Nico did not know what he needed to do for once.

"I am truly sincere with what I mentioned back in the barracks," Frank started once more, slowly lifting his head to meet emotionless russet-brown eyes. "I know I have absolutely no right to ask you this butâ€" I need your help, Nico."

"The only safe way to contact Hazel would be through you. It would not be questioned since she is your sister," Frank explained, lowering his head once more. "I want to assure her at least that I am still aliveâ€" but I cannot meet with her. Notâ€" Not at this point in time where the possibility of a war just looms over our heads."

"Why?" Nico asked. It was a simple question, yet the gravity of the answer he needed to hear was high. _Why now? Why after all that suffering you had her endure?_

"If I had to grovel before her feet to ask for her forgiveness, I

would do so in a heartbeat. If I had to endure everything that you or your family would throw in my way just to prove my worth, I would do so. For her. Nothing has changed with my feelings for Hazel. I do not regret not contacting her if it meant ensuring her safety. But I would eternally regret that I had caused her to endure so much pain by allowing her to believe in false assumptions; that I was dead," Frank answered, fists clenching along his sides.

The son of Hades pursed his lips at the response, unsure how he should process such a confession. For a few moments of silence, his eyes gradually hardened around the edges as he slowly shook his head.

"Even if I am her brother, the risks of sending a letter to her would be too high," Nico explained. "Departing for SkotÃ;di now â€", " The subtle wince of Percy's eyes did not escape his knowledge. "â€" would instigate suspicion amongst the council. That would mean months before I could visit my district."

"There _has _to be a way, Nico," Percy intervened, a frown marring his features. "If there is someone who can come up with a way, it's you."

The son of Hades resisted the overwhelming urge to laugh at that statement, a pained expression settling just briefly on his eyes before he closed them. With a sigh, he settled once more against the comfort of the bedsheets, pointedly ignoring the older males' unease as he contemplated of his limited choices.

As of the current times, risking a letter to his sister which contained of critical information would ultimately result in jeopardy; the risk higher, more so that he was the heir to a foreign, powerful district. As of the present age, it was so effortless to manipulate any individual to veer off-course and support an opposing side, provided a high incentive or a looming threat. Departing for his district soon would merely instigate suspicions amongst the council; suspicions which Triton would no doubt find utmost beneficial against him.

A name fled in his mind, and he had to release a loud and resigned groan â€" which startled both Percy and Frank â€" at the absurdity of the situation. A chuckle filled with disbelief parted his lips once more as he opened his eyes, mock amusement evident in them.

Of course.

"I can't believe I have to deal with that bastard again," the son of Hades breathed, the chuckles that parted his lips gradually alarming the rest of the occupants within the room. "He would truly mock me again when we meet."

"Nico?" Percy hesitantly called out to him, his features contorted with concern as the son of Hades raised himself upright once more.

"Is there any messenger of Anemoi here in the district at the moment?" Nico dismissed his concern with a flick of his wrist before redirecting his attention to the frowning son of Ares.

"The House of Hermes?" Percy questioned with wide eyes.

"There should be a couple," Frank confirmed, nodding. "They will depart at the end of the week."

"Perfect," Nico remarked, his expression becoming gravely serious before he continued. "Take any of the messengers and pass to one of them a black bell, to be delivered to Colonel Lucas Castellan of Anemoi."

"Would he understand it? Shouldn't we attach a simple message at least?" Frank inquired, seeming apprehensive.

Nico shook his head.

"That bastard is no ignoramus. He would know it was from me, and he would likely send his "hound" to accomplish the task in his stead," Nico answered, crossing his arms atop of his midsection. "If there is anyone who could accomplish such a task, it would be him. Regardless, his "assistance" comes at a price."

"I am willing to pay for any price if it can be done," Frank answered determinedly, eyes firm with conviction.

"You will not be paying the price. I am the one who would be requesting his assistance, and thus, he would require the price from me." The son of Hades lifted his hand sharply when the two heirs parted their mouths to protest. "No. I am the only one capable of striking a deal with him. He knows better whom amongst us would be crippled should he try to take advantage of our districts' alliance."

"And that alliance comes with a price?" Percy inquired in a disbelieving tone, arching a brow.

"We prefer to label it as "benefits"," the young man answered slowly, as if carefully weighing each word in his mind before they escaped his mouth. "Anemoi gains a portion of riches and military support from us, whereas SkotÃ;di has unrestricted access to the entirety of Pangaea."

"Information, in our times, is highly valuable. Attaining knowledge of the movements within neighboring districts, much so. Anemoi has access to information â€" no matter how limited â€" with all districts, except SelÃ;ni, of course," Nico's voice reduced to a low whisper at that point, signifying that the information he was disclosing was highly classified. "The Underground, council decisions, everything. Messengers are undeniably vital with the exchange of information, but Anemoi has professional informants scattered across the entire Pangaea. Luke's "hound" is one of those informants."

"Which is how Thanatos is highly aware of the stirring within the Houses of Zeus, Aphrodite and Ares. The three districts are conspiring something that is massive on a global scale and it is only a matter of time before they put their plans into action," Nico added grimly. "All districts are preparing for the worst. Even SpÃ;ti."

Both heirs had to wince at the information, the actual gravity of the situation gradually sinking onto their minds. SpÃ;ti â€" the House of

Hestia " was a district of absolute neutral grounds, and if such a district was already anticipating a calamitous outcome" one could only imagine what was to come.

The New Order was slowly coming to pass, and a Second Dark Age loomed menacingly beyond the horizon. How ironic it was that the sole person whom ended such macabre would ultimately initiate one that might perhaps be equally colossal in magnitude.

"We could discuss this eventually when you are much rested," Percy declared after a few moments of utter silence. "Right now, I think Frank needs to fulfill the task you assigned to him, and you need to rest more."

The son of Ares conceded with a nod, though there was the barest hint of hesitance and raw curiosity in his eyes. It was not questionable, Nico deduced, that the son of Ares would be intrigued by such information. The knowledge of informants within his home district was tantalizing the older male, beckoning him with the need to derive information of siblings and brethren he was forced to leave behind.

"Your sister is fine," Nico breathed, immediately gaining the attention of the son of Ares. "Her supposed consort, an heir to the district of Anemoi, has a few professional informants discreetly watching over her."

"I" Frank paused, taking a shaky breath before mustering a small smile. "Thank you. For that. And for helping me with Hazel."

Nico dismissed his gratitude with a shake of his head.

"I am only helping because you are the sole person to make my sister the happiest that I had ever seen her and she chose you as her consort, which makes you family," Nico answered, lips pressed into a firm line. "I could never entrust Hazel to a better man, though at this point, you have lost much of the respect I had of you."

Frank repressed the urge to wince at that, his eyes filled with morose understanding as he accepted the younger heir's words.

"Right now, her welfare matters most to me. Go, and do as I instructed. Do not make me regret on helping you, Fai Zhang," Nico declared, his eyes seeming to turn a shade darker as a menacing glint presented itself, promising the son of Ares with a world of pain should the latter fail once more.

Frank offered a curt nod, well aware that the son of Hades was more than capable of accomplishing his threats. Offering a hushed excuse, the son of Ares exited from the third heir's chambers, closing the double-brass doors with a subtle click.

"I would not sleep again, even if you insist," Nico murmured, facing the son of Poseidon before the latter could utter a single word. "I feel much more at ease when I am awake."

"I understand that. Though I did hope that you won't be stubborn for once and just rest," Percy replied casually, leaning back against his seat as he crossed his legs. "Informants, huh" Does the other districts you have an alliance with aware of that as well?"

"No. Though I have established an agreement with most of their heirs to see to it that we have a solution in the case that the matters become catastrophic. That aside, I thought you want to have this discussion on a later date?" the son of Hades inquired, arching a brow.

Percy smiled sheepishly at that, his right hand gingerly fiddling with the hem of his vest as he offered a small shrug.

"You had this guarded expression when you were discussing the informants with us. I figured that maybe it was not something you would be willing to share with Frank as wellâ€|?" Percy trailed off, his statement coming off more as a question in the end. Wrong assumptions at that point was what he least needed.

"That is partially true," Nico answered, a frown settling onto his features once more. "In reality, I would rather not have Frank be aware of such classified information, especially with his current status. It is best that he remain a neutral party. Getting involvedâ€|"

Nico trailed off shortly, pursing his lips before redirecting his attention once more to the son of Poseidon.

"If he gets involved any further, either another party would claim his life to extract information from him, or I would extract his life," Nico concluded, his voice grave. "I never kid, Percy. No matter who the person is, and regardless of my ties with that person, I am willing to kill for the sake of my family; my people."

"But you would never kill me," Percy murmured, remembering the words which they exchanged only mere hours ago.

The son of Hades chuckled bitterly, running his fingers through his already disheveled black locks.

"You and Tyson, and two more individuals are exceptions," Nico admitted grimly.

"I don't suppose you would share the identity of those two _special_ people," Percy commented, unnaturally stressing his words towards the end of his statement, as if he were offering implications. Of what, Nico could not be certain.

"I rather take a sadistic pleasure of your boundless curiosity and the means you take to satisfy them," Nico offered, a small smirk curling his lips when the older male pushed his lower lip out, slightly pouting.

"Of course you would," Percy mumbled, though there was a glimmer of amusement and fondness in his eyes as he responded. "I have always been fond of that aspect of you, as equally as it irks me."

"You have always appreciated aspects of what I am that people would condemn otherwise," Nico noted, the smirk on his lips widening. "You have the oddest taste on what you like in people."

"Oddity means uniqueness. I appreciate unique individuals, and you are one of a kind," the son of Poseidon concluded in a playful tone,

the fondness in his eyes remaining evident as he focused his attention to the younger male.

"Flattery would not get you anywhere," Nico remarked with a soft laugh, though his heart was palpitating in a 12/8 crazy tempo and his guts twisted in knots as those molten sea-green eyes remained transfixed onto his frame. "People change, Percy. At this point, I might as well reintroduce myself to you."

"Harsh. Yet, I would not deny that that is true," Percy murmured.

This time, Nico observed bitterness not only on his tone of voice, but in the subtle manner that the smile on his lips narrowed and as the edges of his eyes hardened with the said emotion. There was not a doubt in his mind that the past would occasionally haunt the both of them; the past two years would remain as a subject that neither would come to mutually bridge.

That was a contrasting difference between them. While the son of Poseidon was gravely attached to memories and interactions with individuals, Nico detached himself from anything that could possibly establish a connection to him. Connections were critical, and they could either place one on a pedestal or induce one to be trampled upon by no specific means. If the past had educated the son of Hades with a critical lesson, it was that connections always remained to hauntingly severe him. That, he had inadvertently concluded with Percy. That, he had eventually concluded with a son of Zeus.

"Well then. If we wish to start off on a clean slate, I believe introductions are due," Percy remarked as he arose from his seat, snapping the son of Hades from his musings. "Would you prefer semi-formal introductions then?"

Russet-brown eyes were transfixed for a mere few seconds on the third heir's upright frame, the words of the latter only slowly setting in onto his mind.

"Whichever you please," Nico offered slowly, still slightly dazed to absolutely comprehend the situation as the son of Poseidon extended his right hand to him.

"Semi-formal then. Perseus Tzãkson, son of Salã³mi Tzãkson and Lord Poseidon, third heir to the district of Thãlassa. A man of questionable obsession to the color of blue, and who apparently highly values the presence of a certain young man by the name of Niccolã² di Angelo," the son of Poseidon murmured, mischief and happiness twinkling within those mesmerizing eyes as his introduction caused Nico to laugh. "And who might you be?"

And as Nico grasped that hand, a hundred memories flashed vividly onto his mind. For a mere second, he visualized of his former ten-year old self, gazing up onto those unchanging sea-green eyes as he introduced himself, permitting the then thirteen-year old son of Poseidon to address him with the name his deceased mother used to. He visualized of his visitations to Thãlassa, and the many instances wherein he would give chase to a mischievous Percy who dragged him by the hand whenever the latter played a prank to any of the helpers, with him unintentionally becoming an accomplice; Percy's "partner-in-crime". He visualized of picnics under their maple tree

by the garth, with the occasional presence of a young Theseus as the latter playfully commented of Nico's physique; or lack thereof.

He visualized of Percy as the teen embraced his frame, comforting him on instances where the loss of both his mother and sister from his life would be too overwhelming to endure. He visualized of promises the two of them established, with crossed pinkies and sworn oaths, of a future where they would always remain at each other's side.

And thenâ€¦|

He visualized of the last instance he saw Percy, the latter mentioning of informing him of something important, but he had excused himself from it with the promise to hear it once he had returned; a promise he had not fulfilled.

That is, until now.

The firmness of the grip on his hand offered the certainty that Percy would not allow him to go a second time.

It would prove to be a challenge to start from a clean slate, to pretend as much as what was tolerable that memories of the past were almost nonexistent. Yet, the son of Hades was certain to grasp it, the chance to start from the very beginning once more, if only for the hope that he would not commit himself to another mistake. It certainly would prove to be a challenge.

"NiccolÃ² di Angelo, son of Maria di Angelo and Lord Hades, second heir to the district of SkotÃ¡di. As a precautionary measure, I should not name any specific obsessions â€œ", " Nico had to stifle his laughter when the son of Poseidon snorted in response. "â€œ" but I believe it would be harmless to share that the presence of a certain Perseus TzÃ¡kson intrigues me."

NiccolÃ² di Angelo was never one to back out from a challenge, and he would certainly and thoroughly enjoy this one.

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To be continued

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><p>Guide to this fic is on my profile section._

**Thank you for reading! Until the next chapter!**

End
file.